WILL SHAKESPEARE OF STRATFORD AND LONDON: A DRAMA

MARGARET CROSBY MUNN

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WILL SHAKESPEARE

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A DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS

BY

MARGARET CROSBY MUNN

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Shakespeariana

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M. C. W. May 27-1910.

To

My Husband

GEORGE FREDERICK MUNN

APOLOGIA

To the Spirit of William Shakespeare

If the light of an obscure Imagination
Has touched for a moment some aspects of
Your Veiled Life,
Let its reverent apology be that the dream,
Whether false or true, was unsought,
And that it was noble enough not to be allowed
To perish unrecorded.

The vital and illuminated portrayal of Hamlet of Johnston Forbes-Robertson was the direct inspiration of this play. In some subtle and inexplicable manner the genius of the actor revealed to one listener, at least, the heart and soul of Shakespeare, even more, if possible, than that of Hamlet, and so to my friend, the Player, I record my grateful acknowledgment.

M. C. M.

WILL SHAKESPEARE

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

William Shakespeare

Earl of Southampton

Earl of Essex

William Herbert (called Lord Herbert, afterwards Earl of Pembroke)

Sir Thomas Lucy

Bailly—Chief Constable of Stratford

Taverner—Second Constable of Stratford

Foulke Sandells, John Richardson } Friends of the mother of Anne Hathaway

Leatherby, Swales } Stratford Lawyers

Heminge, Greene } Players

Florian, Peter Dumpser } Pages of Southampton

Mistress Elisabeth Vernon, cousin of the Earl of Essex.

Anne Hathaway, afterwards Anne Shakespeare

Countess of Rutland

Lady Bridget Manners, daughter of Countess of Rutland

Phillida: Gentlewoman in waiting to Elizabeth Vernon

Lords, Ladies, Players, Gentlemen-in-waiting, Pages, Constables, Yeomen, Huntsmen, Pikemen and Villagers.

ACT I

The Caging of the Phoenix

1582

A Forest Glade in Charlecote Park, the country-seat of Sir Thomas Lucy, near Stratford-on-Avon.

ACT II

The Flight

1586

Interior of the home of Shakespeare in Stratford-on-Avon

ACT III

[*Twelve Years Later*]

The Lure of Elisabeth

May, 1598

The Inner Court of the London House of the Earl of Southampton.

ACT IV

The Pyre—The New Phoenix Rises from the Ashes

June, 1598

The Terrace and Garden of the Country House of the Earl of Southampton.

The action of the play takes place between the years 1582 and 1598.

Four years are supposed to have elapsed between Acts I. and II.; twelve years between Acts II. and III.; four weeks between Acts III. and IV.

ACT I

THE CAGING OF THE PHOENIX

1582

ACT I

THE CAGING OF THE PHOENIX
1582

SCENE: *(A Forest Glade in Charlecote Park, the country seat of Sir Thomas Lucy, near Stratford-on-Avon. A background of forest vistas. At left back a stream, suggested by low sloping banks. At left front the tangled roots of great oaks and beeches, and small rocks and mounds of moss appear above the sloping ground. Forest trees flank each side of the stage. At the right, between an avenue of trees there is a space of greensward and then more trees. The whole scene suggests a remote sylvan solitude. The glimpses of sky and the long shadows indicate that the hour is near sunset. A man's voice is heard at left. Before the curtain rises men's voices are calling loudly to each other.)*

TAVERNER

[*From a distance.*]

Where Away? Bailly! I'm lost!

BAILLY

[*Enters clambering over roots and rocks at left front.*]

I'm here, come on!

TAVERNER

[*Nearer.*]

Come where?

BAILLY

Here Fool!

TAVERNER

[*Enters stumbling and climbing with difficulty over the roots, etc.*]

Well said, but fool no more!

BAILLY

How will you compass that?

TAVERNER

[*Groaning.*] My back! My legs!
When young I wished to be a forester.
My father balked my will. [*Still stumbling and clambering.*] These twisted roots
And knife-edged rocks have won my mind to his
More than five years of well-planned argument!
This poaching lad may trap and catch and kill
The deer, the fish, the birds of Charlecote Park
Till all this Forest-land is still and void,
But I'll not hunt him more! I'll be no more
A constable. I'll tell Sir Thomas so.
I will resign.

BAILLY

Resign? You speak with courage!
What shall you do for work? How live? How *eat?*

TAVERNER

Think you I'll be a constable forever?
I have ambitions. I'm an ambitious man.
I'm going to be a miller! Look through the trees

[*Enter from back six or seven yeomen armed with pikes and staves.*]

Where come our Guard!

[*Taverner goes to meet yeomen and they greet each other.*]

BAILLY

No parleying, my friends.
Bestow yourselves deep in the wood's green heart,
Crouch in the underbrush, hide behind rocks;
Be very still and secret, but be keen.
We'll keep this place—Go you to right and left,
So every point be guarded quite, and when
You hear three whistles, let you loose to me,
Like gulls that swoop together to one spot

Upon the sea, where floats the silly fish.
Be off!

THE YEOMEN

'Ay surely, sir.

BAILLY

Stay not too near.
Note well! Be hidden, and lie close to earth,
So your dun doublets and green caps and cloaks
Mingle with leaf and earth and grow together.
Be off, remember well my words!

[*The yeomen go to right and left and back and disappear. Voices are heard at left. Bailly listens.*]

What's that?

TAVERNER

'A woman's voice. No fear!

BAILLY

A *hopeless* fool!
Deep voices sound between the higher tones—

A flute and two bass-viols! Some gypsy-folk
Wander the wood, seeking to pitch their tents.
They'll not stop here; these trees are massed too thick.
We'll hide, and when they pass we'll keep our watch
Until the deer and does come down to drink;
Then shall we catch our stag.

[*Goes to back as voices approach.*]

Be quick! They come!

[*Bailly and Taverner disappear entirely amidst the trees at back. Enter hastily Anne Hathaway followed by Foulke Sandells and John Richardson, both elderly men, through the clearing where the stream is supposed to flow at left back.*]

ANNE HATHAWAY

[*Turning indignantly on Sandells and Richardson.*]

Let me alone! Why do you follow me?

SANDELLS

Why do you follow him?

ANNE

Why question me?
You well know that I will not answer you.
I scarce escaped the village street this noon,
When in the lane that leads to Charlecote wood,
Your shadows fell upon the sunny road
Before my eyes. Your footsteps followed mine.
At every turn I looked and hard behind
Panting for breath, with curious eyes, you came.
This wood is free to rest or walk or—weep.
Yet in this solitude you spy me out.
'T is infamous!

RICHARDSON

Your mother bade us come.
That is our warrant. That our whole excuse.

If such needs be. [*to Sandells.*] An open
question, Foulke?
This wood is free, as Anne most justly says!
For *us* to stray in—as it is for her.

SANDELLS

Your mother bade us come and bring you
home.

ANNE

[*Scornfully.*]
My mother dreams!

RICHARDSON

To wake you from your dream!
That you a woman grown and ripe in years
Should spend your life in wasteful worship of
A Boy!—ev'n worse, a pestilential thief!
A Law-Defier,—twice whipt and once in
prison.
An empty purse—an empty house—an
empty head!
Beggared in all that makes life rich and
full

Yet of such mad and wanton mirthfulness,
That he goes singing through the village streets
His eyes oft skyward fixed, his step so light
That one might dream he'd chanting mount to heaven,
Like any meadow-lark! . . . a public shame!

SANDELLS

Anne, he speaks truth; you must give up this lad.

RICHARDSON

This marriage shall not be, your mother swears.
See him no more. See that you give him up.

ANNE

[*With restrained anger.*]

How then resign that one possesses not?
There is no thought of marriage. I am free.

RICHARDSON

You play with words. To what does dalliance lead?

[*They both draw near her where she stands in centre.*]

Before you we would place the steely shield
Of our protection. Lead you to solid ground.
And all this may be if you give him up.

ANNE

[*With intensity of anger and drawing back toward left; they follow.*]

For once, I'll speak, Sandells and Richardson.
Does it protect me that you spy on me,
Distract my only hour of quietness,
Tear from my heart its sacred woman's veil
And peep upon its bleeding? O I could laugh
If anger did not make me nearer tears!
Beggared he is? What of it? We are rich.
An empty head devoid of all but song?
My head counts pennies all day long at home!

Place me on solid ground? I know no ground
That's firm except my love. It bears me well.

[*Advances swiftly toward the two men who draw away terrified.*]

Go tell my mother I obedience owe
To none. I cannot be coerced or led—
And opposition to my fixéd will
Turns all my blood to poison in my veins.
Hate of your meddling consumes me now—
Go—go—my rage is mounting to my brain,
Hardening my heart. Had I been left alone
Good might have come. Peace to my mother's life,
Prosperity to him I love. . . . All's gone!

[*Turns to left back and flings herself down near one of the moss-covered mounds and leans against it, covering her face with her hands, trembling. Sandells and Richardson stand confused in centre watching her.*]

SANDELLS

Shall we speak more?

RICHARDSON

Since that she was a child,
Her mood once turned to anger changes not.

SANDELLS

We'll go.

RICHARDSON

I'll tell her mother what she says.

SANDELLS

Facing her anger all my mind was changed.

RICHARDSON

The truth she spoke cut deep into my heart,
And made our studied preachment lies.

SANDELLS

Suppose—she marries him? What harm would come?

In very truth her mother's rich for three.
He might quit poaching if his purse were full,
And we'd be free from warding of the maid!

RICHARDSON

The mating of an eagle and a hawk!
Cage him and he would die, and she would plunge
Her talons in his heart. This should not be!
She is a woman too—these fifteen years—
He—in the very prime of callowness!

SANDELLS

There's no solution else.

RICHARDSON

[*Hastily.*] She's stirring! Let us go!

SANDELLS

It is the way of wisdom!

RICHARDSON

Follow me!
We'll all rehearse unto her mother. Come!
[*Exit—Richardson and Sandells softly at left front.*]

ANNE

[*Raising her arms with a wild gesture.*]
Will! Will! Will! Will!
[*She again buries her head on her arms and lies still. A pause follows. The greensward between the long avenue of trees at right is more brightly lighted by sunlight than the centre and left of the stage which is more shaded by the trees. At the furthest end of this sunlit avenue a youth about seventeen or eighteen years old enters. His air is that of joyous irresponsibility. He comes to front very slowly with a loitering step, constantly stopping and looking up into the trees as if watching the birds. He has a gun*

and fishing-rod and tackle slung on his back. About half-way down the avenue there is a clump of flowers growing at the foot of a large tree. He stops and bends to look at them. Then he lifts off his gun and fishing-rod and lays them on the grass behind the tree. He gathers the flowers and after carefully examining them he kisses them and puts them in the belt of his doublet and goes on slowly to front. All the while he is singing.]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Sings.*]

O love me not when I am dead!
[When low lies heart and head.]
O praise me not when I am gone!
[The years are hastening on.]
The crowns of love and happiness
That would my eager spirit bless,
Give to me *now,* nor do thou wait
Until it be too late, too late!

[*While he sings he pauses frequently to stoop and look at flowers and herbs, and then goes on again. He comes to front and turning to cross, sees Anne Hathaway at left back. He raises his hands and lets them fall in half-amused, careless surprise.*]

Again the stormy Anne!

[*Goes nearer.*]

How low she lies, poor Petrel! Beaten down
Into the deepest hollow of the waves
By the wild tempest she herself creates.
I'll blow my gentlest breeze and bring a calm!

[*He goes softly to back and bends over Anne, standing beside her so that his face is seen.*]

She's sleeping!—While her face is wet with tears
And wrung by violence within—Sleep! Sleep!
Poor tortured soul! In thy sea-depths
There lies the Pearl of Peace—while thou art still

'Twill slowly rise, milk-white and luminous
And spread a tranquil balm! Sleep! Sleep!

[*He withdraws and goes toward the tree where his gun is lying. Before he reaches it, Anne stirs and raising her head sees him. She hurriedly rises—stands irresolutely,—then smoothes her hair with her hands and goes toward Shakespeare who does not yet see that she has waked.*]

ANNE

[*In a slightly supplicating tone.*]
Will! [*then louder*] Will!

SHAKESPEARE

[*Turning quickly.*]
Your sleep was short. Pray Heaven it was sweet.

ANNE

[*Coming nearer to him.*]
Why are you wandering in the wood to-day?

SHAKESPEARE

I have a tryst.

ANNE

[*Impulsively, and with suspicion.*]

A tryst? What village maid
Pursues you to the heart of Charlecote Park?

SHAKESPEARE

[*With simplicity and humor.*]

None Anne, save you.

ANNE

[*With impatience.*]

Men make not trysts with men.

SHAKESPEARE

With no man's son am I pledged here to-day.

ANNE

[*With growing irritability.*]

You veil the truth with double answering.

SHAKESPEARE

[*With mischievous simplicity.*]

I speak the simple truth. Nor doth maid nor man
Entice me here. [*Anne looks relieved.*]
And yet I trysting come!

[*Anne again is angry.*]

The truth perturbs your mind. Let me try Fancy now.

[*He speaks with mystery, drawing close to her.*]

A Dryad haunts this wood; she loves a Faun.
Her steps tread down the earth beneath her feet
As do a Queen's the footstool for her state.
Her parted, burnished, brown-gold, curling hair
Shadows her whitest forehead and her brows
Lie sternly level over proud, deep eyes,
That know their rule over men's roving hearts.
Her lips, a rose's petals, nobly carved,

Fulfil her eyes despotic ravishing:
And with her comes the fragrant, woodland
breath
Of sylvan glades recessed, and hidden pools
Where she has loved and dreamed through
thund'rous nights.

ANNE

[*With fierce jealousy.*]
You speak of a real woman. Is't not true?

SHAKESPEARE

Who is more real than she of whom I dream?
Last night by starlight I lay musing here
She fled to me and wept. Her faun was
false,
A Nixie's thrall. Her vengeance I've as-
sumed.
The Faun and I will fight at set of sun.
Ev'n now I think I see his leaf-crowned head
Peering upon me from behind that oak,
And hear the drawing of his bow—
[*He advances with sudden swiftness to*

Anne and takes her arm and points to a tree at right near front.]

There! There!

ANNE

[*Who has listened and looked as if under a spell, screams and hides her face on his arm.*]

O pity—save me! I am terrified.

SHAKESPEARE

[*First laughs lightly—then as she moves from him and he sees her frightened face he becomes grave.*]

I ever am at fault with you. I thought
To bring your smiles. Instead, I rouse your fears.

[*Still more gravely.*]

My idle fantasy must not delay
Your homeward-tending steps. See! The sun sinks!
Your mother watches for you; you must go.

[*He leads her gently to left and she, as*

if still under a spell, yields. Suddenly she stops and again speaks with suspicion.]

ANNE

True, it is late. Why then stay here alone?

SHAKESPEARE

I never am alone.

ANNE

[*Violently.*] You falsify!
I spied you quite alone this very hour.

SHAKESPEARE

A vast procession endlessly defiles
Along the tortuous avenues of my brain.
This wood would be the highway of the world
If they should throng its aisles. Lovers and queens,
Kings, courtiers, fairies, maids, spirits of earth,
And Heaven, are crowding here.
[*Touches head.*]

Some not far day,
They'll steal into my heart and live.

ANNE

[*With dense bewilderment.*]

My word!
I understand you not.

SHAKESPEARE

Delay you not.

ANNE

With hard discourtesy you drive me hence.

SHAKESPEARE

Not so. But have it so if so you will.
[*Urges her gently to left.*]

ANNE

Cruel! You suffer not—you know not grief.

SHAKESPEARE

I suffer, yet am not unhappy, Anne.
How pertinently you half speak the truth.

ANNE

Danger still hedges you. Your father mourns—
He is no more an alderman, 'tis said.

SHAKESPEARE

They've dragged his robe of office from his back
That was so straight with pride; for a just fine
Last week he could not even four pence pay.

ANNE

I'll pay his fines. Such trouble should not be.
[*She takes out her purse and offers him money.*]

SHAKESPEARE

Put up your purse. I'll slave or sin for him,
But I'll not weep! Something is singing here—
[*Touches breast.*]
That hidden in this fooling life I lead,

There is a magic, and a mystery
Waiting some kiss of fate to spring to birth
And wrap me in its glow and ecstasy.
That is reality—this mere trifling play.

[*Anne listens bewildered.*]

Go now. No longer stay your steps. Go now.

ANNE

You are a boy. Yet in your eyes and voice
You are a master, and I must obey.

[*Exit Anne. Shakespeare leads her away and then returns and springs gaily toward the tree behind which his gun and fishing-rod are lying.*]

SHAKESPEARE

Come now, my trysting deer! My father waits
Hungering sore. My trespass wins him strength.
I'll seek my traps hid deep in brush and brake.

[*Exit Shakespeare carrying gun, etc., at left back near stream. The sound of horses and carriage approaching by the grassy avenue at right is heard. A little boy's voice speaks, just out of sight. A travelling carriage somewhat splendid in color and ornament is driven into the grassy space between the trees at right. The postilions turn on their horses and watch while the door of the carriage is flung open and a little boy about nine years old tries to get out. Two men inside the coach, dressed in the most fashionable costume of the period, try to prevent his alighting. He wears a courtier's costume of pale blue satin with a plumed hat, and curls of golden auburn fall on his shoulders.*]

EARL OF SOUTHAMPTON

[*Struggling with the two men.*]

I pray you, gentlemen, hinder me not!

I'll walk awhile beside the stream.

[*He frees himself and springs out of the carriage.*]

FIRST GENTLEMAN

[*Follows him.*] My Lord,
Lord Burleigh waits for you at Kenilworth.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

[*Also getting out of carriage.*]
We are in honour bound to hasten there
And place you in his arms without delay.

SOUTHAMPTON

My guardian tells his wishes all to *me,*
And I obey them—when my pleasure suits.
Then he is happy too and all is well.

[*Looks up the river and claps his hands.*]

I see a darling swan that slowly floats
Just—just beyond the turning of the stream!

[*Both the gentlemen roughly take his hands and try to lead him back to the carriage.*]

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Come, come, Lord Southampton, the carriages
Outstrip us by five miles. We must press on.
[*Southampton shakes himself free and speaks passionately.*]

SOUTHAMPTON

I tell you if my Guardian were but by
He would be happy if I rested here
In this dear wood. I would be here alone.
[*To postilions.*]
Drive on a little space. Quite out of sight.
[*The carriage drives on just out of sight.*]
[*To Gentlemen.*]
Follow the carriage, you, else I shall tell
Lord Burleigh how you laid rough hands on me.
But if you will be kind and grant my wish
[*Coaxingly.*]
My little, little wish, I'll silence keep.
My word of honour!

[*The two gentlemen who have looked alarmed, confer together and then follow the carriage, first bowing low.*]

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Humbly, we obey.

[*Exit gentlemen. Southampton stands in centre. Shakespeare enters from left back carrying gun in his hand. He stops in surprise at the sight of Southampton who looks at him with the same surprise.*]

SHAKESPEARE

More beautiful than was my Dryad! Gods!
He is not real . . . I know he is not real!

SOUTHAMPTON

Who are you? Will you shoot me with your gun?
I've read of robbers—[*Comes closer.*]
May I see your cave?
If you will hide me there, be very sure
My guardian will a royal ransom pay.

SHAKESPEARE

How exquisite, how fair his fashioning—
Heaven's own best make! How tripping sweet his speech!
Lovelier than all my dreams! He must have strayed
From some far, magic palace.
[*With half mocking gaiety.*]
Little Prince
Of Fairyland, my gun is but a toy
That I do sometimes—play a little with—
As you yourself do sometimes play, mayhap,
With that most splendid sword slung at your side.
Tell me, if it so please your gracious will,
Whence do you come and whither do you go?

SOUTHAMPTON

You speak as did the players at the Queen's
Great birthday feast last year,—but gentlier.
I go to Kenilworth. I come from London.

SHAKESPEARE

How rudely he dissolves my dream; And yet

The charm remains! Merely to Kenilworth
He goes!

SOUTHAMPTON

I'm tired of Kenilworth! Instead
I would stop here with you in this green wood,
Swim in that deep, clear stream, follow its curves
And touch the whitest feather of that swan.
Then gather flowers wild and sweet, like those
You wear. The loveliest I've ever seen!

SHAKESPEARE

[*Removing flowers from his belt.*]

Will then your Highness take with you these flowers?
The only homage I can offer now!
I heard once, or perhaps I—merely—dreamed—
Of one sweet, weakling soul—She drowned for grief!—

Who gathered flowers like these,—it may have been—
And gave them ev'n as I do now,—and told
Their names with fancies such as these—

[*He gives the flowers one by one to Southampton.*]

Here is
Tender Forget-me-not, and here Narcissus,
'T was named for him who died in ages gone
For love of his own beauty. So might you.
And Violets that mean Love and Death—and one
Small, sweet, Blush Rose to nestle at your heart.

[*Southampton looks bewildered at his words but takes the flowers.*]

SOUTHAMPTON

[*Looking at flowers.*]

Lovelier than those they plant in Kenilworth!

SHAKESPEARE

In Kenilworth what pastimes will refresh,

And with what royal comrades shall you meet?

SOUTHAMPTON

I'll play at Bowls and Tennis and I'll see
The Lady Bridget Manners.

SHAKESPEARE

Bridget Manners!
Sweet powers of Melody! But what a name!
Manners should mate with—something musical!
But is she kind, this Bridget? Does your suit
To her fare sweetly? Unfold now your heart.

SOUTHAMPTON

[*Pouting.*] She flouts me.

SHAKESPEARE

Ah! How more than passing strange
That any little maid so hard should be,

When I a man am wax to my heart's core
With one note of your voice's piercing sweet!
[*Enter from right back, timidly, the two gentlemen in waiting.*]

FIRST GENTLEMAN

[*Humbly.*]
My Lord of Southampton, the hour is late.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Indeed, we fear Lord Burleigh's wrath, my Lord.
The while this woodland hind stands parleying.

SOUTHAMPTON

I'll keep my promise, and I will come now.
[*The two gentlemen look at Shakespeare rudely.*]
Salute this gentleman. He is my friend.
He gave me these sweet flowers and he speaks

Something as does the Queen, when she commands
And every one obeys.

[*The gentlemen unwillingly bow, removing their hats, and Shakespeare returns the bow carelessly but with equal courtesy. Southampton holds out his hand to Shakespeare who takes it in his and kisses it.*]

You have been kind
To me—I wish I could be kind to you!

SHAKESPEARE

Remember me, when to your Fairyland
You come.

[*Exit Southampton and the two gentlemen in waiting at right back. Shakespeare stands gazing after them as if in a dream. The sun-light has grown dimmer and more golden. A crackling sound is heard in the bushes by the stream at left back. Shakespeare draws his hand over his eyes as if he*

were waking from sleep. Then with his gun in his hand, held ready to shoot, he steals swiftly and silently to the stream and crouches down by the bushes, in sight of the audience, close to where the sound is still heard. A pause.]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Speaks softly.*]

It is a doe! I'm sorry for't.
I can't betray the curious innocence
Of those broad brows, that gentle, liquid gaze.
I'll catch it with a noose and take it home;
And when my father's hunger's fierce within him,
If that he will, he'll kill it for himself.
So—So —

[*He unlooses a rope slung with his fishing tackle and making a noose throws it and catches the doe and leads it toward the front centre of the stage.*

From the back, from behind the most distant trees, Taverner and Bailly rush forward and catch Shakespeare by the arms. Shakespeare still holding the leash flings them both off and with the doe runs to back. Bailly puts his whistle to his lips and whistles once loudly.]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Laughing as he begins to run, after throwing off the two men.*]

A merry chase! Your sturdy legs
Against my long ones!

[*Immediately after Bailly blows his whistle, three or four constables and yeomen run forward from behind the trees at back. Shakespeare sees them and turns abruptly to left. Bailly whistles a second time and two or three more appear from left near the stream. Shakespeare turns to right but as he runs toward it Bailly whistles a third*

time and several more run forward at right. All surround Shakespeare.]

SHAKESPEARE

'Ah! I'm caught! I'm caught!

[*He struggles with the men and throws them off.*]

The odds against me are by far too strong.
But you, at least, shall go unhurt and free.
Go little Gentleness!

[*He releases doe and pushes it toward left back toward the stream. The doe slips between the yeomen and disappears at the same spot where it first appeared. Taverner has been scrambling to his feet and rubbing his back and head. He rushes forward as the men again seize Shakespeare.*]

TAVERNER

Disarm him! Bind him!

[*To Shakespeare, shaking his fist in his face.*]

You Infamy! You murderous young Fiend!
You threw me down! Flung *me,* a man of Place
Upon the ground! Bind him without delay.

[*The men hesitate and then tie Shakespeare's hands behind his back, after taking his gun, etc., from him. Shakespeare submits. He wears an expression of alert but impersonal interest in what is happening.*]

BAILLY

[*Coming forward.*]
Why do you bind him? He cannot escape.

A CONSTABLE

'T was Master Taverner commanded us.

BAILLY

That's foolishness. Unbind forthwith his hands.

[*To Taverner.*]
It shames strong men to bind a slender youth.

[*The men obey.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Smiles. To Bailly.*]

Why, Sir, you have a fine sense of proportion,
And I thank you.

[*He shakes hands with several of the men in succession.*]

Well met Colin,—Robin—
Tame hunting for you, friends, with twenty hounds
Full cry upon a solitary hare!

[*Enter hastily Sir Thomas Lucy from back, accompanied by a farm bailiff, yeomen and huntsmen. All make way for him. He looks about the group and sees Shakespeare.*]

BAILLY

Sir Thomas Lucy!

SIR THOMAS

[*To Bailly.*]

You have trapped your stag!
Your whistles borne upon the evening air

Came to the open meadows where I walk
At close of day, and told the game was caught.

[*Goes to Shakespeare and speaks sternly.*]

Your thieving vagabondage now shall cease.
No more in Stratford nor in Charlecote Park
Shall you, a public nuisance, go at large.
You shall be whipt again,—prisoned again,—
And when your term of durance has an end
You shall be banished from this country side
To wander outlawed in some distant land.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Earnestly, as if agreeing with him.*]

Most wisely said! Yet sterner than is needful.

[*While Sir Thomas speaks, Anne Hathaway has re-entered at left, followed by Sandells and Richardson. All three look anxious and agitated. Anne hears all that Sir Thomas says. As he stops*

speaking she goes swiftly to Shakespeare with a cry of intense grief.]

ANNE

All this I could have saved you from! Ah me!

[*She sinks at his feet, fainting. Shakespeare and Sandells bend over her and try to revive her. One of the constables brings water from the stream in a cup.*]

SIR THOMAS

Who is this woman?

RICHARDSON

'T is Anne Hathaway,
Daughter of Richard Hathaway—

SIR THOMAS

Of Shottery.
If memory serves me right he died last year;
I held him in my high esteem and trust:

'A prosperous man.—How comes his daughter here?
What is this out-at-elbow scamp to her?

RICHARDSON

Your Worship, 'Tis a most unlucky case.
She loves him, and is fain to marry him.

SIR THOMAS

His bride shall be the chain that fetters him.

RICHARDSON

[*Insinuatingly.*]
If that your Worship would a moment hear—!
[*Sir Thomas silently assents.*]

RICHARDSON

'Tis one of those strange cases that defy
The will of man—th' opposing of events.
She loves him and is fain to marry him.
She may not be turned from him. But in truth
Her mother's rich in gold and loves her child!

Anne's of full age—in fact these long years past!
If Will were freed, she'd surely marry him.
If that the penalties your Worship names
Could be transformed by magic of your will
To fines, that could be paid in solid coin
To be disbursed for prospering the town
She'd gladly pay them all. Sandells and I
Come now from conference in the wood with her.
Hearing the turmoil, we returned together.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Who has overheard what Richardson has said, starts away from Anne Hathaway and draws near Sir Thomas and Richardson.*]

Enough! I'll bear my punishment alone.

SIR THOMAS

[*To Shakespeare.*]

Silence is seeming in a prisoner.

[*To Richardson, in a lower tone.*]

There's wisdom in your thought; but there's
no edge
In money that will clip this Eaglet's wings.

[*Shakespeare seems about to speak, when Richardson silences him by a gesture.*]

RICHARDSON

[*Aside to Sir Thomas.*]
If you will grant me, sir, a moment's speech
With this unruly youth, my words may tame,
Where whips and bars have maddened to
more wildness.

SIR THOMAS

Most willingly.

[*Richardson goes to Shakespeare and draws him to front centre.*]

RICHARDSON

Listen! Here is your chance.
The last youth offers you. An open door

To freedom, honour, peace, prosperity.
Anne's heart is yours, why not your life for her?
Her mother will consent, to silence tongues.
If these things do not move your will perverse,
Bent on mere wantonness of idling sport;—
Think of your Father where he mourning sits,
Bereft of place and fortune ere life's close.
Before it be too late repair his loss,
And bring a happy end to all this pain.

[*Shakespeare listens with close but impersonal attention.*]

SHAKESPEARE

I would these things could move me; they do not.

[*At this moment Anne wakens from her faint and moans. Richardson goes to her and Shakespeare turns to look.*]

ANNE

Alas, Will!

[*Shakespeare starts, goes to her, and bends over her. Anne looks up at him piteously and speaks with intensity.*]

Banished. Then life's stopped for me!
So let me die.

[*Shakespeare looks at her with profound pity. Then he slowly moves away from her toward front. As Anne sees him go she moans again, holds out her hands toward him with a desperate movement and then sinks back in apparent unconsciousness. Shakespeare stands in front looking forward.*]

SHAKESPEARE

Imprisoned I was free—
Though caged, my steps were never turned aside
From that free Highway of the Soul, whence I

Looked forth upon the Vision of the World,
And up into the Treasury of Heaven.
But there are airless prisons of this life,
Where living men and dead are chained together:
Where white-winged birds are caged with beasts that crawl
And burrow in the slime. Such do I fear;
Such are some marriages that I have known.
The flower-covered traps—Gold and Repute—
They catch me not. Even my father's grief
Does not compel the bondage of my life
That dimly knows the trailing comet's flight.
[*With a sudden change looking toward Anne.*]
But this poor woman—beaten, torn and crushed
By violence of passion, by her unsought—
A helpless target, struck in th' core of being
By the barbed, wandering shaft of Love—
She calls—she calls for largesse from my heart!

[*A short pause.*]

There is a blindness in the soul of man
When all the Powers of Darkness have their way.
We dream—we wake—and Life belies our dream.
'T was perfect—and there's nothing here to match it.
Yet ever onward must we fare and live,
And *act;* blindly spring forward in the dark,
Or rot in self-reproachful, base inaction.
What is my outer life worth now to me?
Whipt, prisoned, banished, all because
I play with any passing toy for joy of being,
And for the lack of—Stars and Goddesses!

[*The sun sinks out of sight.*]

That blindness—It is on me now—
Only one path to tread, one thing to do.
A worthless life! But if it save another's,
And make it bloom, it has some right to be.

[*He goes quickly to Anne, and kneeling on one knee beside her, takes her hand. She wakens and looks at him. He*

speaks lightly and with gracious courtesy.]

If that a life so tattered and so slight,
So out of all repute held good by these,—
[*Indicates the group standing near—Sir Thomas, Sandells and Richardson.*]
Can mend and strengthen yours, why then—
'tis yours.

ANNE

What do you mean? I do not understand?
[*Sandells and Richardson look delighted.*]

SIR THOMAS

[*Laughing.*]
Wise Youth! He chooses Marriage Bells, instead
Of clanking chains. Kisses for stinging lashes.

ANNE

[*In dazed wonderment.*]
You'll marry me?

SHAKESPEARE

It seems my destined fate:
And I believe that one day it shall be.

[*Yeomen and constables crowd around shaking his hands and smiling.*]

SIR THOMAS

With this most fortunate conclusion, Friends,
Let us each homeward go. The twilight falls.
To-morrow in the town we'll ratify
With pen and seal what here is merely speech.

[*All go out of wood at back and left. The yeomen and constables first. As the younger yeomen go, they sing.*]

Song.

Sunlight dieth,
Daylight flieth,
Homeward now!
Leave the furrow, leave the plough,
Rest beneath the bending bough.

After toiling,
Rugged moiling,
Follows rest.
Homing swallows find the nest,
Find we each the True-Love's breast.

By the gleaming
River's streaming,
Waits the maid.
Dost thou linger? Art affrayed?
Hasten! Clasp her—undismayed!

[*Then follow Sir Thomas Lucy and the farm bailiff. Then Sandells and Richardson. Shakespeare has helped Anne to rise to her feet. She looks revived and seems to question him earnestly and he to answer. At last she smiles and turns to follow the others. Shakespeare stands motionless as if in deepest thought.*]

ANNE

[*Holding out her hand.*]

Come, Will!

[*Shakespeare turns quickly and takes her outstretched hand and they go together a few steps. Then Anne stops suddenly.*]

You say that you will marry me,
But will you *love* me?

SHAKESPEARE

I'll be patient with you.
Be patient then with me.

[*They go on a little further. Shakespeare turns and looks toward the oak to which he pointed when he spoke of the faun with whom he was to fight.*]

Farewell my Dryad!

[*They go.*]

[*Yeomen repeat second verse of song softly, in the distance, as the curtain descends.*]

After toiling,
Rugged moiling,
Follows rest.
Homing swallows find the nest,
Find we each the True-Love's breast.

CURTAIN

NOTE—*First Act*—The difficulty of bringing a live doe on the stage in the first act can be overcome easily by not having it appear on the stage, but having the noise in the bushes heard, and a portion of the body of a live or stuffed doe seen in the distance in the bushes. Shakespeare can go into the bushes and noose it, and afterwards can untie it and release it in the same way.

ACT II

THE FLIGHT

1586

NOTE—*Second Act*—As the orchestra comes to the end of the interlude between Act 1 and Act 2, it plays the refrain of an old spinning song—the violins imitating the whir of the wheel. The music ceases just before the curtain rises. While the curtain is still down, the thump and whir of a spinning wheel is heard, and an old woman's voice sings a song to the same refrain which the orchestra has been playing; the curtain comes up while she is singing, showing a dark room.

ACT II

THE FLIGHT

1586

SCENE I. [*Before the curtain rises a woman's voice is heard singing to the whir and thump of a spinning wheel.*]

Song

He kissed me once upon the lips
  And since that time my heart has burned,
As the wild bee who honey sips
  He left me and has ne'er returned.
    Ah wellaway!

I'll braid my love-locks like a crown,
  My shoes upon my feet I'll bind—
I'll seek him far as London-town,
  I'll seek—but shall I ever find?
    Ah wellaway!

[*As the song ceases the curtain rises. The scene is living-room of the house of Shakespeare in Stratford-on-Avon. The room is almost dark. At the back in the centre is a wide door. On either side is a large square window. All open directly on street, but are closed and darkened by heavy wooden shutters, through whose chinks the early daylight gleams. Enter from door at right Anne. She looks older with lines of ill-temper and discontent on her forehead.*]

ANNE

[*Groping her way to the nearest window.*]
How dark it is!

[*She throws open the wooden shutters and the window, and the white morning light, without sunlight, fills the room. Through the window is seen the village street and opposite houses. The walls of the room are hung with*

an arras of painted cloths, much faded and tattered. It is simply furnished with old wooden cupboards, tables, chairs and settles. There are doors at the right and left. At the left there is a large fire-place where a few embers smoulder. Anne stands at the window.]

How damp and chill! One would swear it were March not May!

[*She goes to the other window and flings open the shutters with a powerful movement. All her actions are strong, sudden, energetic. She shivers and goes to the fire. She speaks with anger.*]

The fire nigh out and no wood! The careless oaf!

[*She goes to the door at right.*]

Will!

[*She goes to the arras to straighten its folds and as she twitches it with sharp jerks the portion she touches comes off*

in her hand. She flings it to the floor.]

Plague on these wretched rags! All's rotting here. There's not a woman of family in Stratford who has not had new cloths since two years back and these were old when I wore pinafores! Will!

[*Enter Shakespeare from right. He looks but slightly older than before. As he enters the sunlight floods the village street and shines into the room.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Going to the window and looking out.*] There is magic working with the gray church tower—no stone remains; naught but gold tracery against a sapphire sky. Look, Anne!

ANNE

[*Speaking with quick energy.*]

There lacks time for looking out of window. I go to Shottery this hour.

SHAKESPEARE

Wherefore?

ANNE

That my mother should longer nourish our children makes my body tingle with shame. She has harboured them now two months. I go to Shottery to fetch them home.

SHAKESPEARE

[*He has listened with a half frown, but smiles as he speaks.*]

'Tis sweeter when they're here!

ANNE

Sweeter! Can we think of sweetness when they are to be fed and clothed? I sent them to my mother that they might prosper by her bounty. But she is old. She wearies even of their play! Last week her pale face smote me and the neighbors' eyes when they see me here alone, make my brain burn and breed a madness in me.

SHAKESPEARE

They might have rested here.

ANNE

And starved! You speak too easily. Five to feed even when we count not your father and your mother.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Lightly.*]

You speak too largely. There has ever been enough for all.

ANNE

You seem to think our children should be content with food and clothing.

SHAKESPEARE

[*With mischief.*]

There is scripture warrant for that!

ANNE

You seek to anger me.

SHAKESPEARE

Ah, no! Believe me, no!

ANNE

No man in all Stratford has done so little for his children as you! Indeed you do nothing! You are in truth your father's son.

SHAKESPEARE

[*He has listened with an air of detachment.*]

What do my father and my mother now?

ANNE

Your mother spins and sings old songs in the upper room. Out in the garden in the sun your father sits idle. His eyes stare, yet see nothing; for I passed before him now and though he looked, he saw me not.

SHAKESPEARE

[*He opens door at right near front. A glimpse of a garden is seen. He looks out.*]

I see him . . . His hands lie on his knees as if they rested. Their burdens are laid down; but the blurred eyes do not rest. There is no immortal hope before, nor no rich harvesting of joys behind. It is age's listlessness not its repose!

ANNE

[*Who has not listened.*]

I talked with Dame Calverly yesterday when we were cheapening ribbons with the pedler from Henley. Her husband has sent their daughter to London to see the sights and their two sons to Oxford to study at the University. And mine have naught before them!

SHAKESPEARE

[*With amused pity.*]

How ingeniously your brain weaves nets to trap your thoughts and torture them! Their ages mounted up upon each other count not to six years. There surely is yet time before such matters press!

ANNE

[*Violently.*]

You are of all living men most maddening! You delay and postpone. You are forever playing at quoits and bowls—drinking and laughing with the village idlers. What have I or your children to hope for from you?

SHAKESPEARE

[*Kindly, taking her chin in his hand and looking into her eyes.*]

Know you not that no one hour is like another, no year like that which follows it? And so with men and women. I am not now what I shall be. Nor you—Nor you! Last evening when we walked we saw the bare, brown meadows by the river. You said that in August they would be yellow with grain. [*He plucks a small branch from a rose vine growing by the window.*] Why are there no roses on this vine?

ANNE

You mock me. The time for roses is not yet.

SHAKESPEARE

[*With sudden intensity.*]

You do not ask the rose to bloom before its time. You do not rifle the mould of its seeds when it has been newly planted. You do not tear the seedlings up to see their roots whether they grow or not. How do you know what grows in me? What seeds sown by a hand more skilled than our poor wits can wot of may be ready to blossom in my soul? [*He speaks gently.*] If I may but have time—stillness—twilight and dark and dew of the sky—sunlight and noon: and be untouched as are the seeds *you* plant!

ANNE

[*Blankly mystified.*]

Now, now, you seek to puzzle me—to lead me aside from what is urgent. [*Angrily.*] Most urgent do I say.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Half aside.*]

She cannot understand.

ANNE

[*She speaks with still quicker energy than at first, looking at the clock.*]

Seven o'clock; and I must be back by noon for dinner!

[*She goes to the cupboard at right and opens it.*]

Here is cold pasty and oaten bread and cakes. Meagre fare for six! But so the children have enough I care not for myself.

[*Goes toward street door at back.*]

I go, Will, good-day!

[*Shakespeare is at front; he searches in his pocket and takes out a key unseen by Anne. He fingers it with an air of abstraction. Anne goes. In the doorway, she turns.*]

And Will—at five this morning the maid and I cleaned the upper rooms and freshly made all the beds. Fetch you the wood. Do not let the fire go out as yesterday. These May-days grow chill at night, and the children come!

SHAKESPEARE

You shall have a royal fire!

ANNE

Good-day.

SHAKESPEARE

[*In a gay, half-singing voice.*]

Heaven go with you!

[*Anne goes. He slips key in his pocket and goes out of door at left. He returns at once carrying a great armful of firewood. He piles it with extreme care beside the fire-place.*]

If I am perfect there can be no reproach! I know not why—but—anger which turns a man into a beast is even more loathsome in a woman. [*Lightly.*] Just or unjust we look to them for gentleness whether they feel it or not! Yet there's a kind of secret justice in our feeling. For they will ever tune us to their own key—if they but knew it! [*A log rolls from the pile. He replaces it.*] Keep

your place, Trifler! Know you not this is grave work and our greatest part? Since we belong to the Noble Order of Husbands we must please her, or the way roughens too much for further progress.

[*He stands at a little distance and looks with satisfaction at the pile of wood.*]

She will have a royal fire! [*He glances at the clock.*] She will be now on the road to Shottery. All's still! This hour is *very* friendly.

[*He goes to the cloth hanging at right and drawing it aside unlocks with the key he still holds a small door in a cupboard set in the wall and from it takes a manuscript.*]

ANNE

[*Returning to the door but not looking in.*] Will!

[*He starts and replaces the manuscript and closes the drawer hastily.*]

Will! Forget not the fire! Have you laid the fire? Have you piled the wood? Answer, I go.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Absently fingering the key.*]

I've piled it mountains high!

ANNE

'Tis well—for yesterday we froze. Good-day! This time I go.

[*Shakespeare goes to the door, looks after her. Then he re-opens the drawer. He takes out the manuscript and goes to table at front and sits, turning over the pages of the manuscript.*]

SHAKESPEARE

Words are our only immortal things! Any fool can hammer the noblest marble statue in the world to dust, but the Gods themselves cannot destroy a word, once the same fool has *said* it!

[*The embers on the hearth flicker brightly and go out.*]

I ever believe that these words of mine

shall be spoken, so magically—as it were so enchantingly handled,—that their own value will be doubled. For singleness is nothing! They have a kind of life of their own on the page—but let them be spoken by resolute lips that marry each word as they touch it and all the world shall feast at the wedding banquet! Yet a playwright who passed through Stratford once—an old man—with a beard—he must have known! said to me that players were such fools that the bitterest moment one who writes for them can have, is to hear his own words stupidly spoken—in discord—out of tune and sense! Yet, there are those who command the speaking and moving magic. I could not myself! But that Godlike little boy I met in the wood four years ago;—our common tongue in his mouth became a novel and precious tune that fed the heart. Ah!—I cannot think upon him! My senses so sicken to see and hear him again! . . . Yet there still must be such! [*He turns the pages of the manuscript.*] All's been said and

played—from Athens to London! Yet the Heart of Things remains, for every man to find the answer to his own.

[*He writes. Village boys and girls pass in the street. They peer into the window and seeing Shakespeare writing point and jeer at him, laughing with each other. He does not observe them. Bailly and Taverner, the constables, followed by two men, one middle-aged, spare and scholarly, the other of the same type, but younger, come to the door, look in, and knock loudly.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Starting from his chair.*]

O for a few hours of quietness! [*He goes to the door.*] What is your wish? Whom do you seek?

[*The men enter.*]

TAVERNER

We seek your father, my young Featherhead.

SHAKESPEARE

What commerce have you with my father?

BAILLY

That is our concern, and not for your questioning.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Speaking with courtesy.*]

Mayhap then, I can guess: somewhat touching his estate or moneys brings you here. My father is old in truth lacks force to carry himself—far less the weight of his affairs. Such I purpose to lay upon these shoulders, which have at least the virtue of strength!

TAVERNER

Ah, Ah—I remember, I do well! You had ever a folly for turning fine phrases, even while you cut a calf's throat for your father, when he purveyed meat for the township.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Springing toward him and catching him by the throat.*]

Liar!

[*Then shaking him by the shoulder as if he were a puppy, and trying to laugh.*]

Know you not whole armies of constables have been swept from the earth for less than that?

TAVERNER

Help! Help! Murder is being done!

[*Three pikemen with long pikes rush into the room from the street and stand close to Taverner. The two lawyers have shrunk into the corner and now come forward.*]

Now, now, Master Leatherby and Master Swales, do you see? Did I not rehearse how he flung me down in the wood four years ago —like a brigand, like an assassin, a murderer. It is just as I have always said—"Save a man from the gallows and he will cut your throat."

MASTER LEATHERBY

Most wisely said, indeed!

SHAKESPEARE

[*Still trying to laugh.*]

Is this a comedy, or a mystery play? Inform my ignorance that I may split with laughter or be duly awed as the quality of the piece may demand.

BAILLY

The images suit! [*To Taverner.*] Enough of playing the Injured! [*To Shakespeare.*] Briefly, Master Will, we are come, not without regret in the hearts of such of his townsmen as know, perforce, of the matter, with a warrant for your Father's arrest and due restraint by the law.

SHAKESPEARE

[*With mingled incredulity and anger.*] A mad world!

BAILLY

One of necessity, you should say.

SHAKESPEARE

We'll argue that.

[*He quickly crosses the room and as he passes the door to the garden he stumbles against a chair, which closes the door. He locks it, putting one hand behind him, still facing the others, who do not see what he has done, and hides the key in his doublet.*]

A pretty Game! As merry as New Cut, and as provoking as Primero! And these gentlemen, [*to lawyers,*] can each take a hand—and so all will pass the day pleasantly. The stakes to be our Golden Opinions of each other, the prize a general Amnesty—in which all share. Including of course, my father. Merely as the host of the gamesters, who make so free with his house—such as it is. Come, come, The Game! The Game!

[*He motions them to sit down around the table. He sits—leaning on the table, while the others stand surprised around it. To Master Leatherby.*]

How, most erudite sir, can that which has not strength to resist be restrained? Answer.

[*To the other Lawyer.*]

Keep a precise record, sir, of the play, for each point counts.

BAILLY

[*Gravely.*]

The comedy of which you spoke, is of your own playing, now, Master Will. Where hides your father?

SHAKESPEARE

Before I answer, in all seriousness and kindness tell me, as briefly as may be, what legal warrant there is for thus seeking to bring my father into custody?

TAVERNER

Have I not foresight beyond the common? Prevising these questions I brought Master

Leatherby to convince Young Featherhead of our procedure according to law. Your documents, Master Leatherby.

LEATHERBY

[*Producing a legal paper and reading in a dry, monotonous voice.*] "This indenture Witnesses that John Shakespeare of Stratford on Avon in the county of Warwick is indebted to sundry persons hereafter named for the sum of sundry pounds of current English money, hereafter set forth, and that he must doe, cause, knowledge and suffer to be done and knowledged, all and everie such further lawful and reasonable acte and actes thing and thinges, devise and devises assurances and conveyances whatsoever—"

SHAKESPEARE

Enough, enough—I believe anything you wish without further assurance!

LEATHERBY

[*Looking at him over his spectacles and*

continuing in the same manner.] "As also the saide John Shakespeare and his heirs and assignes, and everie of them, of and from all former bargaynes, sales, leases, joyntures, dowers, wills, statutes, recognizances, writinges, obliagtory ffynes, entyles"—

SHAKESPEARE

[*Moving chairs with some noise and confusion.*] You fatigue yourself, sir. Be seated. Refresh yourself, I entreat—and you, sir—and you—and you!—

[*He opens a cupboard and brings out a tankard of ale, mugs and cakes. He pours out the ale and offers it to the lawyers and constables and pikemen. They accept it half-astonished and after drinking a little of it their stern expressions relax and they seat themselves at the table, all but the pikemen who stand in the corner and drink and talk in whispers.*]

SHAKESPEARE

Now, Worshipful Sirs—What sums are needed to free my father from this process? [*To Leatherby who produces another long document.*] No longer weary yourself, *Noble* Sir. [*To Bailly.*] You are no doubt acquainted with the facts? Spare Master Leatherby. His breath should be reserved for matters worthier its spending.

[*Leatherby looks pompously gratified.*]

BAILLY

[*Taking a slip of paper from his pocket and reading.*] For the Asbies Estate. For interest on the mortgage held by John Lambert, twenty pounds; to John Brown of Stratford for money loaned, ten pounds; to the Town of Stratford for debts for the Stratford Theatre, forty pounds. To sundry other private persons whose names I need not now set forth, forty pounds. In all one hundred and ten pounds. [*After a pause and looking with sympathy at Shakespeare.*] You

understand, Master Will, that his fellow townsmen hold your father in respect and high consideration, but they have waited many years and all suffer. I regret both for him and yourself that such troubles should be.

SHAKESPEARE

I thank you. There is no fence for ill fortune. [*While Bailly has spoken, he has carefully noted each item on a slip of paper.*] Were all this paid anon, he would go free?

ALL

[*With the exception of Taverner.*] Yes! Yes!

TAVERNER

[*Laughing jeeringly.*] Anon? Two anons and a by-and-by, makes a while and a half!

[*The others try to silence him.*] Anon! It's now that's needful. Anon, he asks? Shameful asking should have shameful nay!

SHAKESPEARE

[*Without appearing to notice him.*] If full payment could be assured for all public and private debt within a reasonable time, would such time be granted by the law? [*To Master Leatherby.*] Vouchsafe your valued judgment, Gracious Sir.

LEATHERBY

[*Who has been enjoying the ale.*] A reasonable time—Yes—Yes—There should be no justice without mercy.

SHAKESPEARE

I pledge myself to pay these sums within two years from this date and in the interval to pay such interest as may be deemed sufficient both by the town and those private persons who have been at loss.

TAVERNER

He promises like a Lover to his Maid! What security can he give? I ask that of

you all? Seven hands in the dish here. Two in the purse and that an empty one, and an Idler at the fore. Ha, ha! They that have not worked in heat must linger in frost! Ha, ha!

[*Shakespeare appears as if he had not heard Taverner.*]

BAILLY

[*Losing his temper.*] Silence—Flea! [*To Shakespeare.*] We know your love of uprightness of dealing; that you are gentle and honest, of an open, free and frank disposition; but that some security should be assured is a necessity that you must understand. [*To Leatherby.*] Kindly explain this point to Master Will, sir.

[*Leatherby produces from his bag another document. Shakespeare hastily fills his mug with ale.*]

SHAKESPEARE

I neglect your comfort. No proof is necessary. Your honored word suffices.

[*Leatherby bows affably and drinks. Shakespeare sits motionless with an expression of anxious thought. All wait silently.*]

BAILLY

If due security could be given I doubt not that your proposal would be acceptable to the town and the private persons (touching memorandum) herein set forth.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Showing his despair.*] Security? Alas! I have none.

LEATHERBY

[*Having finished all the ale on the table.*] Then the law must proceed. What we came for should be done. [*He stands and the constables also rise.*] Take us to your father.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Passionately and springing from his chair and standing with his back to the garden door.*]

You may not see him!

[*The constables, lawyers, and pikemen rush toward him.*]

LEATHERBY

"May not" is said not to the law.

BAILLY

He hides in the garden! Out of our path! You presume on our patience.

[*He attempts to push Shakespeare aside.*]

SHAKESPEARE

S'death! I'll presume yet farther before you pass this door.

[*They struggle.*]

The Voice of Shakespeare's Father (without)

[*He knocks at the door to the garden.*]

Will! Will! What means this turmoil? Who is within? Open!—[*A silence.*]

SHAKESPEARE

Peace, Father! A bout of wrestling for

pleasantry with some of the neighbors. 'Tis over. Go you to the pleached alley at the garden end. They go!

THE VOICE

'Tis well—I go to the pleached alley. But more stillness were meeter for the honor of my house.

[*All stand silent and surprised.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*With passion.*] Is it justice or reason to put a man in gaol who is too feeble to stir abroad? When the heart acheth the whole body is aworse and my father is weighted by lassitude. A helplessness that is inert because there is beneath it no stir of hope. I know from words and signs of whose meaning I have discernment that he has come not into church for a year for fear of process for debt. All's at an end for him. Youth, manhood and the mighty tide of ambition that sweeps the middle years. Yet pride still lives

in him. Like all wounded and feeble things the sorer to the touch because it has been hurt already. Wound it not still more. Strike it not now so that it die in agony. In his prosperity did he not prosper all? Was it not he who fed the poor and starving when the plague ravaged the town? Was it not he who built a theatre for Stratford that we might have some surprise of laughter, some strangeness of fancy, some grace shaped with Art to turn the stones of our daily lives to bread if but for an hour's space? For which of these things do you prison him? Who has ever had thought to reward him for these gifts? Should not there be some generous handling of him who was generous to all?

[*He pauses. The men are visibly affected.*]

Suppose an if you do this thing—Suppose you drag this sick and bleeding soul to gaol what gain have you? He shall have no more gold to pay you then than now, and you have stained the records of the town with dark in-

gratitude that no time to come can wash white. [*He pauses again.*]

BAILLY

These be true words.

[*The others assent silently, all but Taverner.*]

SHAKESPEARE

And I will pay all. Set this security aside. Give me but two years' grace and if Fate send not some hooded calamity across my path to strike me before I can see its face, whether it portend evil or good, nothing in life shall stay my triumph.

[*He covers his eyes with his hand and then removes it looking fixedly forward and slightly upward.*]

BAILLY

[*With emotion.*] Friends, I am for giving him his way.

LEATHERBY

[*Throwing off his dry manner.*]

Am I a simpleton that I so trust this youth, and without reason?

TAVERNER

[*Despairingly.*] The twist of his tongue turns their stiff brains on their very hinges and oils them so they do not even creak!

SHAKESPEARE

[*With impetuous sweetness.*] Give me your trusts, Gentles all. Let me wrap them in my heart—fulfill them with its impulse and its strength and when the fruit of my travail lies in your hands you will be justified. Do you consent?

LEATHERBY

[*Slowly and hesitatingly.*] There is no legal warrant for such exception to the law.

SHAKESPEARE

Do you refuse?

LEATHERBY

We cannot.

SHAKESPEARE

Then let all lie in the secret kindness of your hearts and let me prove my words.

BAILLY

I will lay all before the town council and in all truth I do believe I will prevail.

SHAKESPEARE

May the goodness that is Divine refresh your hearts for this sweet faith. Farewell good friends.

[*They go. He shows them to the door and then walks swiftly to the front.*]

I should be overwhelmed at what the years—their movement and their mystery—wrap around my life, but that I have within assurance of strength to match their force, magic for their mystery, freedom beyond bonds. These bonds I seek not to break. I scarce know how they came. Call it human pity—the higher side of that same weakness that wronged another life—or, on the other hand,

clutching selfishness that assaulted a man's defenseless side. Man made for woman—woman made for man. The mystery of opposites—distant and strange, yet dragging into gripping closeness diverse lives. Call it fate, blindness, sex, anything but Love. But when we stood before the altar and the Priest asked pledges, did I not shout them? Let be then. It is as it should be. It cannot be otherwise. See—there am I in the steel-bound cage and for my sin I acquiesce. And then—a brush of heavenly wings, an opening of the heart, all unforeseen—and we are as Gods, fathering unfledged souls, that we who are aware, entertain as angels, kneeling at their feet, bending our ears to catch some lisping of the wisdom and the glory they have newly left. O I should moan and shrink when thought of these sweet young lives that Heaven has given me holds the courts of my brain, were it not that in even balance with their crushing weight is my will to draw forth this life's richest juices for them as I

tread its press. To pour out for them wine, distilled from every tree of Knowledge and Life, whose fruit I pluck and eat because all is mine, as I fare on the world's highway. My father and my mother . . . Let me compass peace not in their ken for them. And for my wife—my wife—*my wife*—Is she then indeed *my wife?* What the hawk does not hold beneath her iron claw may the Eagle ranging far bring to her bleak holding in the rock? My vision is at fault. There is an emptiness at my heart. I may not see farther. Nor would I. There is balm and calming in the veil of mist that floats at dawn and lifts at last to show a novel splendour.

[*He uncovers his manuscript and looks at it.*]

I thought it would be long to finish this but see how it completes itself! There lacks here but little. Speed, speed! And my apple of Hesperides may ripen by noon!

[*He writes with an expression of joyous content on his face. John Richard-*

son and Foulke Sandells pass the window at right and after looking in, rap gently at the door which is slightly ajar. Shakespeare continues absorbed in his writing. They push open the door and enter stealthily. They look at each other and then sit in two chairs at left and watch Shakespeare silently for a moment, shaking their heads. They look older and are dressed in black clothes as if for a visit of ceremony. They cough and shift their chairs somewhat noisily. Shakespeare looks up suddenly and sees them.]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Gaily.*] Richardson and Sandells, my ancient Ravens! What does this visit omen? Why this sombre plumage of a morning? Is it a tithe meeting? Or a funeral? Is Dame Fernlow's cat dead? Or Dame Hathaway's black cow? Unfold!

RICHARDSON

[*With injured dignity.*]

We bear a message to you from Dame Hathaway.

SANDELLS

With vast unwillingness.

SHAKESPEARE

[*With a quick frown but speaking with good humor.*] A weighty message—Since two must carry it. What's wrong with my wife's mother?

RICHARDSON

There's nothing wrong with her. The trouble is with you, young Featherhead.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Turns and faces the two men looking at them piercingly. They both flinch and look uneasy.*]

What is the nature of my trouble? Give it a name, I beg. I've read of a man who look-

ing up to the sky and seeing a comet feared it, until he heard that it had a name, when he concluded it must be harmless and went into his house again, content!

RICHARDSON

You must give us, Sandells and me, credit for judgment—wisdom—

SANDELLS

Tact.

SHAKESPEARE

O enormous!

RICHARDSON

[*Slowly and impressively.*] Only duty—the sacred obligation of old friendship brings us here.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Looking at the clock and speaking in the same manner.*]

Only Duty—the sacred obligation of old promises made to all the Powers that be, force me

to tell you that I, (speaks very rapidly) have only two minutes to listen to you.

[*He stands and moves a step or two toward the two men.*]

SANDELLS

[*With uneasiness.*] Tell him, Richardson. I'll not face Dame Hathaway with her words unsaid.

RICHARDSON

Dame Hathaway is dissatisfied with your way of life. [*Shakespeare looks astonished.*] It is four years since you married her daughter and during that time you have idled, lounged, drunk sack with your rude wildrakes and Anne has kept the house and her mother has paid the bills. You have done no work—

SHAKESPEARE

O pardon me!

RICHARDSON

Wherefore?

SHAKESPEARE

I have worked.

RICHARDSON

And in what fashion?

SHAKESPEARE

I have—written.

RICHARDSON AND SANDELLS

[*Laughing sneeringly.*] Pray what have you written?

SHAKESPEARE

[*Who has been good-humored and careless until this moment becomes suddenly grave and reserved.*]

Words.

RICHARDSON

[*Again laughing jeeringly.*] Words!—words! And that he calls work! Well Dame Hathaway says there's to be no more

of these "words." You must go to work with your hands, like any other honest man, or Anne's Mother's money shall keep you no more—and—

SHAKESPEARE

[*Going to the two men with a swift, irresistible movement, takes them by the shoulders, and quickly, but gently, pushes them to the door and out into the street, speaking as he does so, with breaks and pauses as he pushes them.*]

When the Phoenix was consumed—even to ashes—in his own nest—he flew away—up, up, up—into the burning blue of the sky, with new feathers. Such glorious ones! Did you ever read the story? No? Go home then and read it!

[*The two men stumble over the threshold and out into the street and disappear hastily, looking timidly over their shoulders as if to see whether Shakespeare follows or not. Shakespeare*

looks after them, laughing uncontrollably. He waves his hand to them with gaiety and calls.]

SHAKESPEARE

Come again anon,—to-morrow—to dine! We shall have venison for you and tripe and onions and sack!

[*He writes again as before. Music of violins, flutes, haut-boys and horns is heard down the village street and the shouting of boys and girls. People come to the doors and windows of the houses opposite and some come out on the street.*]

A BOY'S VOICE

Hallo! Hallo! [*A boy enters street skipping and running.*] Way! Room! Make way! The Players! The London Players from Kenilworth!

[*Boys and girls follow him, laughing, skipping and clapping their hands;*

then a group of villagers, then musicians playing, followed by a group of players. They are all men and boys and look shabby, travel-stained and tired. At Shakespeare's door, which stands open, they stop and the leader, a middle-aged man, knocks. Shakespeare has heard nothing and still writes. The knock is repeated more loudly.]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Starting.*] O—who knocks?

FIRST PLAYER

Gentle, sir, is this mayhap an inn, where we may refresh ourselves? We are most weary—having walked this morning from Kenilworth where we played yesterday for my lords Leicester and Essex.

[*The other players are grouped about the door behind the first player. The musicians and villagers stand behind them in the street.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Going joyously to the door.*] Enter friends! All! For *you* this is an Inn—and for refreshment!—Why, what there is, is yours!

PETER DUMPSER

[*A Village Boy*]

This is no Inn. 'Tis Will Shakespeare's own house!

[*The players hesitate.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*To boy.*] That's enough from you, sir. Silence or you shall have no cakes!—Too truthful Peter Dumpser! [*To Players.*] I said it was an Inn for *you.* I entreat you—Brothers—Pass not my door without entering!

[*The players and musicians yield and enter. The villagers hang back and, after shaking their heads and demurring, all go with the exception of*

Peter Dumpser and one villager who lingers in the street.]

SHAKESPEARE

Rest—rest. Here are seats for all.

[*He pulls about the chairs and settles. All sit in background. Shakespeare opens doors of cupboards.*]

All's cold, alas!—But here's game-pie and oaten bread and sack and cheese.

[*He empties the cupboards and puts dishes and beer mugs and jugs on the table and begins to serve the Players. All take food and eat and drink. Shakespeare gives a double portion to Peter Dumpser.*]

FIRST PLAYER

But, sir, there is no seat for you—and all the pie is gone!

SHAKESPEARE

When you eat I also am fed! [*He sits on*

the edge of the table.] What did you play yesterday for my Lord of Leicester?

FIRST PLAYER

A Fairy Masque.

SHAKESPEARE

[*With eager interest.*] And by whom written?

FIRST PLAYER

By one Campion. You know his plays?

SHAKESPEARE

Alas! I am till now ignorant of his name.

FIRST PLAYER

'Tis a pleasing pastoral and suits in this May time in the open air, with songs composed by one of our company here.

[*Points to a young musician.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Goes to him and shakes his hand.*] I

must hear these songs! Your eyes are bright with Love-light. A nightingale, I'll swear to it!

MUSICIAN

I thank you. A Hedge Robin, say rather!

[*Enter, riding by the village street, Heminge and Greene. They dismount before Shakespeare's house. A villager who has lingered in the street holds the bridles of their horses, while they enter the door and then leads their horses away. They are richly dressed in courtier's costumes of brilliant satin.*]

SHAKESPEARE

Heminge and Greene! Whether the substance of a dream or flesh and blood, welcome to Stratford again.

HEMINGE

We pass never your Father's door, Will,

without a sight of you, but we thought not to find all our company of the same mind!

SHAKESPEARE

[*Embracing him.*] Ah, Heminge. Your voice! No spirit speaks so soundly. [*He embraces Greene.*] Welcome, old friend. [*Some of the other Players stand and one brings some chairs near front.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*To Players.*] My thanks for this courtesy. You were the gracious forerunners of old sweetness renewed. These are my fellow-townsmen. [*Drawing close to Heminge and Greene.*] Amazing transformation! You left Stratford with empty pockets, meanly clad, and you come back ruffling it in glaring satin suits, on horses like Lords, and I'll swear, with full purses!

GREENE

[*Laughing.*] There be many who have

gone to London who can tell the same pretty tale.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Touching his ruff and costume.*] On my soul, a ruff of lace like a Lady's. A chain and jewel of amethyst shaped heart-wise graven with tender emblems; a heart with a winged cupid shooting; his arrow guided by a Venus kneeling; a flower-broidered doublet; Love-Lies-Bleeding with Forget-Me-Nots! [*To Heminge.*] And you—his match in all these dazzlements! How comes this?

HEMINGE

Fortune's caprice turns even the way of a poor playwright! Blind like Love!

SHAKESPEARE

[*With eager interest.*] Is it even so? What plays please in London now?

GREENE

O, anything of the Peep-show order from a Bear-garden to a Dog-fight!

SHAKESPEARE

[*With disappointment.*] No higher soaring?

HEMINGE

Fairy-Masques and spectacles, (so there are satyrs who scramble to make the groundlings laugh, with songs and music cunningly interspersed) are borne with some show of patience. We played in one such yesterday at my Lord Leicester's at Kenilworth. We play it again in London when June opens.

SHAKESPEARE

Ah! If I might but see you then!

HEMINGE

You affect the stage?

SHAKESPEARE

I lack at this time opportunity to affect anything—except as a kind of curtain-raiser, beer and skittles. But—I have my own moments!

HEMINGE

And that way lies salvation!

GREENE

You would mayhap like to join our fraternity?

SHAKESPEARE

My imagination is ensnared by your bewitching show of this our puzzling world; for through the noble or jesting words you so pointedly speak and through the mummery of your action I read a kind of free translation of the wonderful pageantry of Life that illuminates it—for me! For *me.*

GREENE

You have played yourself?

SHAKESPEARE

Most indifferently in our Village shows.

HEMINGE

O, we all had a beginning! Others must judge of your talent.

SHAKESPEARE

I am my own kindest critic.

HEMINGE

Then from your own showing they must rate you too low for even your modesty.

SHAKESPEARE

Impossible! For I rank myself, and were I easily capsized I should be completely so by my own pleasure in what I do—when I do it well.

HEMINGE

Then you do somewhat and well—and what may it be?

SHAKESPEARE

I am of your craft.

GREENE

You too! In the circles in which I revolve no one does anything else. But is

there then no more novel impulse from this fresh plenitude of solitary nature that surrounds you than to take to the too-trodden highway of the Playwright? No secret by-path that you alone frequent where you may have raptures of discovery for yourself alone?

SHAKESPEARE

Unshared pleasure grows stale.

HEMINGE

But not so stale as fruit thrown on the market and neither bought nor eaten! I have plays on my shelf that in imagination I saw the public swallowing like manna from Heaven, when, in fact, they spewed them forth and there remained for me but to gather up the fragments!

SHAKESPEARE

Even if it bloom not for me, let me live always in the perfume of the Rose! I love the theatre! Its air would be sweet to me

even if the flowers in its gardens were not of my planting.

HEMINGE

Show us of your imaginings—

GREENE

We entreat you.

SHAKESPEARE

Do you wish me to fright away the shy Angel of my Thought before I have mastered his whisperings? I thought not to unlock the gate to my garden of unfading flowers until they bloomed as sturdily on their stems as they do in my own mind—but when Opportunity knocks so graciously only Folly would keep it closed.

[*He uncovers the Mss. and hands it to Heminge.*]

A Fairy Masque such as you have played even now. A dream I dreamed in the Forest here on a night in Midsummer.

[*Heminge turns the pages and reads while Greene looks over his shoulder.*]

HEMINGE

[*Indicating a line.*] Excellent fantasy!
[*They read on.*]

GREENE

Brave notions!

HEMINGE

A prospering wit!

GREENE

A Fairy Masque indeed—but not such as we have been playing! Ours was fustian, this cloth of gold, if all the stuff be of this weaving.

HEMINGE

[*Who has continued to read and turn the pages.*]

Strange witchery! These fairies live—
These men and women are the shadows!

SHAKESPEARE

In the Fairy World 'tis so.

GREENE

Never so before, yet true!

SHAKESPEARE

Should not art, like truth, be inevitable? A great painter draws an arm. Never so drawn before. Yet all the world cries out—"An arm should be like that! It could not be otherwise."

HEMINGE

The truth from the mouth of a babe!

GREENE

[*To Heminge.*] Burbage should see this.

HEMINGE

[*Turning the pages of the Mss. to the end.*]

This is not all? It will be long to complete it?

SHAKESPEARE

A few hours of quietness! The end—and one might say a glorification of the whole! Or—I might lay this phantasy aside. I have other plays that might please more.

HEMINGE

Come with me to London—show this play to Burbage, our manager. There is hunger, know you, in the public stomach—though my dishes lack seasoning to their zest! Come with us!

SHAKESPEARE

[*With sudden reserve.*] I know not if that may be.

HEMINGE

A prudent youth. A vision of failure outweighs the chances of glory!

SHAKESPEARE

Not so. [*To Greene.*] My desires match your words and my impulses rush to marry

them. My hopes blossom in the sun of your gracious encouraging. How may I requite it?

[*Enter Peter Dumpser with ale and cakes.*]

PETER DUMPSER

[*To Shakespeare.*] There's ale for you, Will Shakespeare, for all have drunk save you.

SHAKESPEARE

You come at a fortunate moment, truthful Peter, a fresh spring where our own well runs dry!

[*He refills the glasses of the players.*]

HEMINGE

A glass to your London journey and good luck at its end!

ALL

The London journey!

[*All drink laughing and applauding and clinking their glasses. The door to the street at back in the centre is suddenly pushed open and Anne enters. Her face is pale and rigid with excitement and anger. She passes swiftly between the seated players on either side of the door, and goes to front.*]

ANNE

An end to this. This is my home and this my husband. My home not for defilement by pot house carousals. My husband not the comrade of vagabonds. Out—Out all!

[*The players all rise and stand in confused astonishment. Heminge and Greene look at Anne with cold curiosity.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Springing to Anne, and laying his hand on her arm.*] Mad—and more blind than mad! Unsay your words. O Anne, there's

more at stake than your short vision sees! [*To players.*] Gentlemen—my friends—a wild mistake! Some lack of understanding in our village-folk, pardonable to your larger experience, is untowardly shared by my—most honoured wife. [*To players, but more especially to Heminge and Greene.*] She knows not who you are! [*To Anne, with pleading intensity.*] Speak again, with gentleness. Salve the hurt your wild words cause these generous, kindly folk. [*To players.*] All's understood my friends. Go not! Be seated, that our pretty comedy of the arts may go on!

[*The players who have begun to move toward the door yield to his urgency and again sit.*]

ANNE

[*With increased anger.*] An impudence,—a cowardice I scarce believe even though my eyes see it? Silly souls! They know they trespass in an honoured house, yet they sit

still and say nothing! [*To Shakespeare.*] Is it not enough that we are ruined by your father's theatre-building madness here in Stratford, that you let your own home be fouled with this draggled flock of the high road? Are you sheep-blooded also that you leave me to play the watch-dog and drive them out upon it again?

[*The players rise again, this time indignantly, and look anxiously at Shakespeare as if expecting him to resent Anne's words. He moves to a chair near the table in the foreground and sits looking forward with an air of complete detachment. The players and musicians confer an instant silently and go out of the door. As they cross the threshold Shakespeare springs from his seat and goes to them smiling radiantly.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Grasping the hands of Heminge and Greene and some of the others.*]

A brief farewell! Life leads us through some lying hours, friends, yet truth is lusty! The canker-worm gnaws, but the bud still burns into the rose. Fruition redeems!

[*Exeunt players and Peter Dumpser, whose head Shakespeare caresses as he passes him.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Going to Anne and speaking kindly.*]

Be my friend, Anne, as I am yours. There is no Beauty else.

ANNE

[*Turning angrily from him, and flinging open the cupboard door.*]

My children's food taken from their mouths and given to dogs! [*She turns to the fire-place and sees the grey ashes.*] No fire—a chilled house. [*She throws some kindlings and logs on the ashes and the fire blazes. She turns fiercely to Shakespeare.*] His children's lives forgotten in his wanton pleasure!

SHAKESPEARE

[*Going to her again and attempting to take her hand.*]

Poor stormy Petrel! Is it quite lost the old magic that once stilled the storms which drive your soul so wildly? Listen, I will tell you all my secret. I feared to start fair hopes in your breast until there were some outward showing that your reason would entertain. [*He takes his play from the table.*]

See,—Here is opportunity, freedom, prosperity for you and for our beloved. Know you not that the good will of the gentle, generous folk you have so unworthily driven forth is our safest investiture for our happy fortune?

[*He gives the play to Anne. She looks at it and recoils.*]

ANNE

A play? On this, then, you have spent your strength and the precious days and months that might have been given to honest work? Is it not enough that the hard grip of poverty

holds us, for that your father wasted his substance for a theatre, that you too should play with the dangerous flame? To the fire let all theatre-scribblings go and burn there endlessly and no more torment us!

[*She flings the manuscript into the fire where it blazes for an instant.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Snatching the manuscript from the fire.*] You know not what you do. You are burning up my life!

[*He stands at a distance from Anne holding the charred manuscript, trembling and pale, looking at her wildly.*] Cruel woman! Ignorance — Inexperience! The instincts raging, but the heart unborn. No love, no hope for me in you!

ANNE

[*With frenzy.*] O God! Have you not caused me anguish that suffices? Idler,—robber of your children's living,—unnatural

dreamer of false dreams! Go—let me not see you more. Or, if you will stay there like a block that understands not your own sin. I will go while my children wait without in the garden and wander the streets till I am free from your presence that so maddens me.

[*She opens the closed door and rushes out into the now empty street and disappears.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*With intense bitterness.*] Give greatness, —shall not greatness be returned? The bards and books have written it,—but O how many lies go masqueing through Time, for hungry souls to starve and die upon! Where have I so failed, that set perfection as my mark? We must look to the larger tribunal when the judge of the Hearthstone goes blind. But, when the spring grows bitter, how may the waters of life be sweet? O Life, methought you were my friend! Wherefore did'st trap me in this iron web? What Devil-

spider lurking at its edge waits to end my struggles with its sting? Yet out beyond my web there lies the world. So mighty in allurement, so vast in opportunity. [*He stretches out his arms.*] I have a lust for life and love! What do I see here? What do I hear? No Beauty—no Peace—nor no Progressing. There is no longer foothold for me here in mine own place. For their enriching I must leave my father, my mother, and those sweet lives that taught me through my own heart what God's love for men must be. It may be that the same Providence that pushes the fledglings from their nest now flings me forth from mine. I have watched young birds newly fallen again and yet again to earth. Some snatch of my own life caught me from sight of what befel the helpless, pitiable, soft things. Never saw I *one* fly to safety! Yet before the summer passed, the trees were sweet with song from the young thrushes' throats. Am I—a *man*—less master of my fate than they?

"Come with us," the players said. There

was a large music in the words. "To London." A place that breeds such miracles of finished loveliness as was that prince-boy of the forest, must be a soil where lives can *grow*. Where beats now that gallant young heart? I'll seek him out! God makes a patch of blue for us in every sky,—some star, however dim, the night. . . .

[*He goes to the cupboard and takes out several manuscripts which he puts with the charred one into a canvas hunting bag hanging on the wall. He empties a wallet at his side on the table. A few coins drop out. He takes one and replaces it in the wallet.*]

This will buy food. [*He leaves the others on the table.*] I have often walked thirty miles for pleasure, why not thrice thirty for my life?

[*He slings his gun and hunting-bag over his shoulder. He goes to the table and writes.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Writing.*] My father and my mother. —Opportunity to refill our too empty purse takes me to-day to London. There is needful haste so that I may not now say more, but at the first stage of my journey I will write all that your own minds may ask. Give me your trusts and your good patience until my letter come. Your great hearts will greatly wait. Will.

[*He continues to write on another paper.*]

Anne: You have bid me go. You wish freedom from the sight of me. True it is with some, that what the eye seeth not the heart rueth not. So I go. What I win from fortune shall be yours with but a moiety for my sustaining. Though you know it not, to one goal,—Peace and Prosperity,—from our too separate points we look. The lines converge. When time brings them so close that you

know our vision is the same, though differing in degree, I will come again.

Will.

[*He leaves the letters on the table and taking his cap and gun goes to the door.*]

A CHILD'S VOICE

[*From without the garden door.*]

Father! Sweet father! Let me in.

ANOTHER CHILD'S VOICE

Let me come to you father!

SHAKESPEARE

[*With fierce anguish.*] God blast in hell the fiend that sends those voices to knock at my heart to weaken its resolution—all's dark again! My way as black as night—and I—blind. Yet, if I stay, life perishes in blankness like my father's.

THE CHILDREN'S VOICES

[*Without.*] Father! Father!

[*Shakespeare goes wildly toward the voices, then turning away he covers his ears with his hands and rushes from the house to the street.*]

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE II

SCENE: [*Night. In the background large meadow-land, very slightly rolling, with sleeping sheep guarded by sheep-dogs who also sleep. A still stream lighted by moonlight winds across the meadows at a distance in the background. At left, near the back, are the imposing gates of a private park and behind them, at a distance, is seen the shadowy outline of a Castle or Manor House with dim lights shining in some of its windows. The sky is full of stars and the moonlight lights everything. At the right near the back an old shepherd in a cloak and broad hat watches the sheep, leaning on his staff. There is a group of trees behind the shepherd but far enough away for his figure, turned away from the audience, to be clearly out-*

lined against the moonlit plain. Enter from right Shakespeare, walking wearily.]

SHAKESPEARE

Can lead be quicksilver, or night be day!
How then can all this dead weight in my heart
Be turned again to light and life and song?

[*He stops and looks toward the meadows.*]

This is a sweet land! Full of rest and peace;
With grassy meads and waters clear as Heaven.
I'll lie among those quiet lambs and sleep,
And let the Master-Shepherd lead my soul
Up to the stars for Light.

[*He goes a few steps further and sees the shepherd who has been hidden from him by the group of trees.*]

Ev'n here a taint!
A shepherd of this earth to reckon with.
Hola, my friend!

THE SHEPHERD

[*Startled.*] Who comes? He has a gun,

A poacher—or a murderous highwayman.
What do you, trespasser on private land?
Off, or I'll set my dogs on you, or call
The castle guard!

SHAKESPEARE

[*Laughing.*] Let your dogs sleep!
[*He takes off his gun and holds it out to the shepherd.*]
Take this,
It is uncharged. I do not come to poach,
And as for robbery—Truth, I lack force
For even that—if such were my intent!
My ankles bend, my knees are turned to straw.
I have walked more than thirty miles to-day.
Let me lie there among your sleeping sheep,
Share their mute rest and steal away at dawn,
And be to you a half-forgotten shade
Of night. Do you consent?

THE SHEPHERD

[*Coming nearer and peering into his face.*]
A wayfarer,

And young!

[*He takes his gun and examines it.*]

Uncharged. You are an honest man.
It is not strange you seemed an evil one.
A month ago, upon a night like this,
A night of stars,—a man, armed, ev'n as you,
Asked me his way,—and yonder in the copse
A flight-shoot from the brays, that very night,
He killed a pedlar for his gold. At dawn
I found the body bleeding in the fern.
They caught the killer and this very hour
He's swinging at the cross-roads, not far hence.
On quiet nights, like this—when a breeze blows
This way, you hear the clanking of the chains,
Ay, Ay, quite clear!

[*In the group of trees chains clank.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Shuddering.*]

Does murder haunt that copse?
I thought to hear of chanting nightingales.

THE SHEPHERD

Nightingales, say you? Ay, there's plenty there
But they all sing in June. Whence come you, Sir?
And whither go?

SHAKESPEARE

From Stratford, on the Avon;
I go to London.

THE SHEPHERD

You fare far afield.

SHAKESPEARE

I seek—a Friend! Not many miles away
May one not find the Country-Seat of that
Illustrious youth, the Earl of Southampton?

THE SHEPHERD

Look there—Those are his gates.

SHAKESPEARE

[*With intense eagerness.*]

Am I so near?

THE SHEPHERD

His castle lights shine there.

SHAKESPEARE

Is he within?

THE SHEPHERD

He was—he will be—but, look you, he goes
At sunrise with his train to London town.

SHAKESPEARE

Where is he now?

THE SHEPHERD

Beside the river-bank
He wanders with a troop of young court-folk
As gay and mad as he. With gray heads too,

Old sheep-dogs—like to mine—to keep their lambs
From frollicking too far.
[*In the distance soft music sounds and ceases.*]

SHAKESPEARE

How wondrously
Those floating tones assuage the ear and heart!
I had forgotten there was music in
The world. [*Another strain is heard.*]

THE SHEPHERD

O, ay! They even walk to tunes,
Dance, sing and play with cup and ball by night,
And squander days at cards and dice and bowls.

SHAKESPEARE

And never tire!

THE SHEPHERD

If they tire, sir,
It is with pleasure. If they weary, sure
'Tis surfeiting of overmuch enjoyment.

SHAKESPEARE

There's art far finer, friend, in starving for
A joy and feeding with sharp joy upon
It, when it comes at last.

[*Soft music is heard nearer. It ceases again.*]

THE SHEPHERD

[*Turning and pointing to the right.*]

See where they come!

SHAKESPEARE

[*Looking and speaking eagerly.*]

He who walks first with curls that burn deep gold,
Under the silver moon, is the young Earl,—
Is it not so?

THE SHEPHERD

Ay, he's but fourteen years
Yet heighted like a man. The little maid
He leads, the Lady Bridget Manners,—whom
'Tis said, he courts in deadly boyish-love.

SHAKESPEARE

A man's tenacity! Four years ago
He lisped in his child-music of this child.

[*The music, still soft, is heard continuously, close at hand. A procession of youths and maidens of from fourteen to sixteen years approach with two or three older men and women and accompanied by musicians playing. They wear summer court costumes and flit across the stage from the right to the left, and enter the gates of the castle. They pass with soft laughter and music, more like a procession of spirits than of human beings. As Southampton passes,*

Shakespeare springs forward, with outstretched hands as if to touch and hold him. The procession disappears completely behind the gates and wall of the castle. Shakespeare stands in the centre of the stage watching as if expecting it to re-appear.]

THE SHEPHERD

They will not come again to-night! Listen—
I have a hut a stone's throw space from here,
Rest there—the ground is hard, ev'n for young bones.

SHAKESPEARE

Not so. I'll sweeter rest beneath the stars.

SHEPHERD

Well—well—we are all mad when we are young!

[*Exit Shepherd to hut.*]

[*Enter hastily from gate an old Lady-in-Waiting, stout and breathless.*]

LADY-IN-WAITING

[*Calling.*] Elisabeth! Elisabeth Vernon!
Where has the mad girl gone? Find her I must,
Else will her Cousin Essex rail at me.

[*She hurries into the shrubbery near the gate without seeing Shakespeare. Enter from the group of trees at right, close to where Shakespeare stands, Elisabeth Vernon. She is a tall girl of eleven or twelve years wearing a pale green dress of soft silky gauze, clinging closely and not reaching quite to her ankles. Her arms and throat are bare. Her dark hair falls on her shoulders and her head is crowned with a wreath of green leaves. As she sees Shakespeare, she stops and stands staring at him in surprise.*]

SHAKESPEARE

My Dryad come to life!

ELISABETH

[*Looking at him wonderingly, speaks with easy, fearless confidence.*]

What is a Dryad?

SHAKESPEARE

Enchanting fearlessness!

[*He speaks as if telling a fairy tale to a child.*]

. . . A Dryad is
A woodland sylph, born in a hollow tree
Needing no shelter but the leaves and sky.

ELISABETH

What pretty words you speak! But I'm no Dryad!
For I am but Elisabeth Vernon.
Now, who are you?

SHAKESPEARE

A Passionate Pilgrim.

ELISABETH

[*Shaking her head.*]

I never heard of one before! But though
Your speech is strange, I see your gentlehood.

SHAKESPEARE

[*With emotion.*]

High Heaven has giv'n you vision far beyond
Your world and years.

ELISABETH

My world? What is my world?

SHAKESPEARE

You're of the castle and the court.

ELISABETH

[*Joyously.*]

Well guessed!

[*She draws near Shakespeare, speaking confidentially.*]

Have you seen anyone pass here?

SHAKESPEARE

A troop—

ELISABETH

[*Interrupting.*]

Ah! They are in the castle! He forgot!

[*She tears the wreath of green leaves from her head and throws it on the ground, stamping on it with fury.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*With quick anger.*]

Wanton cruelty!

ELISABETH

[*Looking about in wonder.*]

Where? Who is cruel?

SHAKESPEARE

[*Picking up the wreath and smoothing the crushed leaves. Elisabeth draws closer, looking at him with surprise.*]

You—who so wound these gentle, harmless leaves.

ELISABETH

I wore that crown for Southampton—I waited
In the meadow where he said he'd come,
And he forgot me quite!

SHAKESPEARE

[*With gay irony.*]

A fruitless tryst!
This is my love-struck Dryad in very truth!

ELISABETH

Who walked he with? A maid with hair like flax?

SHAKESPEARE

[*With mock earnestness.*]

The very same!

ELISABETH

That frozen Bridget Manners!

SHAKESPEARE

[*In the same manner.*]

The very same!

ELISABETH

[*Suddenly sobbing.*]

He has forgotten me,

And no one loves me!

SHAKESPEARE

Magic there surely is
In both her childish hate and love that melts
My heart within me! Woodland Child-Princess,
I love you and I never shall forget!

[*Voices within the gate.*]

Elisabeth! Elisabeth!

ELISABETH

They call!

And I must go.

SHAKESPEARE

Once more, farewell my Dryad!

ELISABETH

[*Putting her face close to his.*]

I like you much! Pray come to London soon!

[*She waves her hand to him and runs toward the gate and disappears in the shrubbery within the gate.*]

SHAKESPEARE

Such beings as that radiant girl and boy
Reveal myself to me. I may not think
Upon my darlings left behind. 'Tis ruin.
Yet I still love and evermore must love—
Love makes a mighty music in my heart
And must find noble hearts to answer it
A world on which to lavish all its wealth.

[*He goes toward back near gates.*]

I'll wrap myself in dreams of those I've seen,
And lying at their castle gates all night
I'll wake with dawn and follow in the dust

Of their swift speeding hence, as if 'twere clouds
'Round Phoebus' golden chariot wheels,—to London!

[*He goes to the gates and lies down near them, using his bag as a pillow.*]

CURTAIN—END OF ACT II

ACT III

Twelve Years Later

THE LURE OF ELISABETH

MAY, 1598

ACT III

Twelve Years Later

THE LURE OF ELISABETH

May, 1598

SCENE: [*The inner Court of the London house of the Earl of Southampton. The sides of the court at right and left and back are flanked by the walls of the house of a pinkish cream-colored stone with windows and balconies. The space between these walls is filled by a grass covered court. On the right is a dais with seats, and at the back is an arched opening showing an alley bordered by a high clipped hedge. The extreme foreground of the stage is composed of a very low flat terrace which runs all across the stage from right to left. The front towards the spectators is entirely open. At its farther*

edge are very high, wide arches reaching almost to the top of the proscenium and supported by four slender columns, one at either side on the extreme right and left and the other two at even distances apart. The characters pass across this species of low terrace, supposed to be a part of the front portion of the house. Through the lofty arches, all that is enacted in the court is seen. When the curtain rises, lackeys are hanging tapestries and silk hangings over the balconies and placing flowers in the stone vases at the sides of the court and on the dais. Musicians with their instruments enter one of the balconies. Laughing maids lean out of the windows of the house and the lackeys throw flowers at them, which they try to catch. In one of the balconies a page plays with a cup and ball and another teases a parrot on a perch. Across the centre of the green from right to left is a stone wall or barrier about three feet in height. There are arched exits at each side and also a low closed doorway at the left.]

[*Enter Florian from left, hastily yet with conceited grace. He is a slender, fair-haired youth and wears a page's costume of pale blue.*]

FLORIAN

[*Calling to left.*] Now follow the rest of you, in Venus' name!

[*Enter four pages, running. Three wear the same costume as Florian. The fourth, Peter Dumpser, a youth of eighteen, wears the worn clothes of a rustic.*]

FLORIAN

Stand there, my sky-larks, and tune your throats. [*To musicians in balcony.*] A Harmony, Gentlemen, a delectable Harmony of Hautboys and Shawms!

FIRST MUSICIAN

Which one, gallant Florian?

FLORIAN

The one you have set to my Lord Southampton's song to the Lady Bridget Manners.

FIRST MUSICIAN

We have the music here.

FLORIAN

We are to salute the Lady Bridget's ears with the same this hour when she comes to see the fighting with swords at the barriers, which my Lord proposes to play to-day before the ladies of the Court. Your words, chaunters!

[*The pages produce leaflets with the words of the song.*]

FIRST MUSICIAN

We are ready, gentle Sir.

[*They play the opening measure.*]

FLORIAN

[*Beating time with a wand.*] Now with

a softness since the opening words are dolorous—yet, as there is a daring courage in the closing stanzas, with a joyful noise throughout.

[*All begin to sing to the accompaniment of the musicians.*]

Love hath ever wrought me woe,
Brought me miseries long ago,
Wrung my soul with piercing pain,
Furies followed in his train.

FLORIAN

[*Putting his hands over his ears.*] O—O—O! Love never wrung the soul of any mortal as you are wringing mine now. This is harmony run mad. Again the first line.

THE PAGES

[*Singing.*] Love hath ever wrought me woe—

FLORIAN

There is a voice there like a grater. [*To*

Peter Dumpser.] 'Tis yours. You have no more voice than a peacock, and (observing his costume) without the peacock's excuse of pretty feathers. What do you here?

PETER

[*In a whining voice.*] The Steward bade me present myself to you and you bade me sing. It is true, Sir, I have no voice. I am but endeavoring to make a joyful noise.

FLORIAN

Who are you?

PETER

My Lord Southampton's new page.

FLORIAN

His *new* page! Then your garments are older than your office. Whence do you come?

PETER

From Stratford.

FLORIAN

From Stratford! As far from London as Heaven! Where is your page's dress?

PETER

The Steward gave it me, but he bade me go to you without delay that you should instruct me in my duty; so I came as I was.

FLORIAN

An obedience that has its uses as well as its dangers. Go, put on your habit and return to me here.

[*Exit Peter.*]

FLORIAN

[*To pages, beating time.*] Again. I will take his part. Speak the words with clearness, for 'tis a well-penned metre intended to reach the lady's heart through her ears.

[*All sing.*]

SONG

Love hath ever wrought me woe,
Brought me misery long ago,
Wrung my soul with piercing pain,
Furies followed in his train.

But at last I snared the Boy,
Clipped his wings, and O, the Joy!
For Love taught my Love Love's ways,
Nights of balm and blissful days.

But Alas! the story saddens,
For the fickle maiden maddens,
Told me plainly she loved Love,
Holding him all else above.

But we cannot love without Love,
Cannot doff him as a glove,
We will keep but curb him duly,
That my Love may love me truly.

[*Exeunt Musicians.*]

FLORIAN

The song is well enough, but I doubt its effect. There is more in love than decorum. I have watched the Lady Bridget,—and if the passion in her run not more to good conduct than tenderness, then my eye is deceived as I amourously glint it among the ladies of the Court.

[*Enter Peter Dumpser in a habit like those of the other pages.*]

[*To pages.*] Go wait in the ante-chamber while I instruct this Mirror of Truth in a little vital dissembling.

[*Exeunt pages casting scornful looks at Peter.*]

FLORIAN

What is your name?

PETER

Peter Dumpser, Sir.

FLORIAN

Peter Dumpser! Your parents were as

cruel as mine, who called me Samuel Swales, —but when my Lord Southampton asked me my name, I answered Florian, whereon he immediately gave me a place in his household. Could he have a Samuel Swales and a Peter Dumpser to carry his love-missives, think you? You shall not be Peter, but Pierre, after the French fashion.

PETER

Is not my own name good enough for a page, Sir?

FLORIAN

Good enough for a page! Look you, a page's office may be the first step to that of confidant of a king or the beloved of a princess.

PETER

How may that be?

FLORIAN

'Tis History. I have read it in my Lord's books. There was Hyacinthus who was a

kind of page to Apollo, Lord of Music. Apollo so loved Hyacinthus that he turned things about and became his page in turn, even carrying his arrows to the chase. There was Chastelard, page to Queen Mary of Scotland, who, had he not been over-bold, might have been made her consort, for did she not lean upon him in the Dance? There was Ganymede, who was so fair that an eagle carried him away to be page to Jupiter, one of the Kings of Heaven. Since knowing this, being rarely beautiful myself, whenever I see an eagle, I hide.

[*He takes out of a pouch a hand mirror of burnished silver and looks at himself with rapture, arranging his curls.*]

PETER

Can such things be?

FLORIAN

Printed History.

PETER

I can hardly believe you!

FLORIAN

A page has his opportunities. I see what others do not.

PETER

[*Drawing close and looking at his eyes.*] Yet are your eyes no larger than mine!

FLORIAN

Dolt! It is not the eye, but what looks through it. Listen. All London knows that Lord Southampton courts Lady Bridget Manners. Every dog sees that! But I see that—[*Here he holds up four fingers and checks off the names on them*] while Southampton ever pursues Lady Bridget, Mistress Elisabeth Vernon follows Southampton, and in his turn, Master Will Shakespeare watches Mistress Elisabeth Vernon with fixed and dreaming eyes—and so there they are like four crows on a wall, each looking after the other.

PETER

Would that I might see as you do!

FLORIAN

Behold me. I am still a page, yet when my Lord goes to Court, I am always with the gentlewomen-in-waiting by my good will. There I am in the midst of them, all hot in amity, of look so lovely, smiling to the eye. I gracify the matters with the proudest of them. It is, gentle Florian here and kind Florian there! There is one named Phillida, —a tall, sad-eyed, very perspiring girl,—but with a rare appreciation of me. I have writ her madrigals. Do you think if they were signed Samuel Swales there could be aught of romance about them? But to Court we seldom go now, for my Lord passes his days at the playhouse with the great playwright Master Will Shakespeare, who has become so famous that even the Queen commands him to give one of his plays before her at the Earl of Merton's country seat next month.

PETER

Is Will Shakespeare become so famous as that?

FLORIAN

Lord Southampton is foolish enough to think him as great a man as he is himself—but then he is a poet too! But for yourself, Peter, remember well when my Lord asks your name answer boldly Pierre.

PETER

But that is not true.

FLORIAN

Truth is out of fashion at court. Were it to come in again the Queen's imagination of herself could never survive it. It once ruled the universe undisputed, but that was ages gone when Adam was but a vapour and Eve a sweet breath of air. No, no, Pierre. Believe me, to lie honorably is one of the first duties of a page. The guests come soon. I have not eaten since morning. By my soul, which I believe has its dwelling in that part which nourishes me, I am hungry!

[*Enter the other pages.*]

FIRST PAGE

Shall we keep the Court, Sir, as is the custom at this hour?

FLORIAN

[*Angrily*] Who bade you intrude on me? Pierre keeps the Court to-day, while I eat. Out—and wait on me when I bid you.

[*Exit pages with angry looks at Florian and Pierre.*]

FLORIAN

I go. Keep you the Court. If any stranger come, ask him his name and business. If he answer not to your satisfaction, be in the bones of him at once.

PETER

[*Timidly.*] How may that be, seeing I have no sword?

FLORIAN

Have you not fists and feet? Speak to

him a rough speech full of passions with your tongue and let your other members do the rest. Come aside and I will show you the right knock. See—there—and there—and there—

[*Exeunt Florian and Peter, Florian striking and kicking and tripping Peter up. Peter helplessly parrying his blows.*]

[*Enter Shakespeare and Southampton, walking slowly, their arms around each other's shoulders, their heads bent together in earnest talk. They wear Court costumes, Southampton's of more splendid ornament than Shakespeare's. Southampton wears his hair in long golden curls on his shoulders. At centre they stop and separate, Shakespeare still keeping his hand on Southampton's shoulder.*]

SHAKESPEARE

Beware of Essex.

SOUTHAMPTON

[*With surprise.*] Say you so, and why?

SHAKESPEARE

Mistake me not, Southampton, for the man
Compels my love;—since Nature hath herself
Compounded him of vital elements.
Urbanity innate, a noble person,
Of courtesy that oft fulfils itself
Against the current of his headstrong will.
But deep beneath the seeming of such grace,
Lie boldness, even to temerity,
And arrogance that forces him to rule,
Even though that rule be ruin to himself
And those swept with him in audacity.

SOUTHAMPTON

For him the Queen waxes uxorious,
Softer than melting honey in the sun,
Which Essex' fingers dabble in at will.
Such moulding at her years is deep impressed.
Essex is safe.

SHAKESPEARE

He draws in over-fast
Of the Queen's courtesy—as does a child,
Nursed ever by a too indulgent nurse,
And he will tire as does the sated child
And seek a newer plenty of his own
O'er which alone he may have sovereignty,
And give of it to whom and when he wills.
I speak but from imperious love of you—
Trust not his dangerous fondness. Join no scheme
Fledged by his rash imagination.
Let comets dash their ruin through the spheres,
Shine you a radiant light in your own place,
Apart and safe.
[*A fanfare of trumpets is heard without.*]
What pleasure claims the hour?

SOUTHAMPTON

We fight with swords against these barriers
I here have raised. I'm tired of dallying

With baby sports! Look what a wonderful
Sad change there is in our young Londoners.
Our ancient wrestling with strong force of
arms
To wallowing in ladies' laps at cards;
Our running steeds and coursing hounds to
cosseting
In chambers at the levees of the Queen—
England's young manhood turned to feeble-
ness.
So I, to sting virility to life,
Again command such foregone games as
these;
A saving calling-back of vigorous times
When even pleasure taxed men's strength and
blood.
I lead one band's assault against the other.

SHAKESPEARE

Who leads against you?

SOUTHAMPTON

Essex.

SHAKESPEARE

Ah!

[*He takes Southampton's sword in his hand and touches the point, which is covered by a cap.*]

Mark this.
A harmless button.—If in ardent play
That grows too fierce, such button should be wrenched
From off your enemy's swift-thrusted blade,
What proud and dear young blood would flow! Have care!
For some men keep a special dagger for—
Their friends.

[*Another fanfare of trumpets is heard.*]

[*Enter Florian.*]

FLORIAN

The guests approach, my Lord.

SOUTHAMPTON

Come, Will,
And meet them at the outer door with me.

[*He throws one arm over Shakespeare's shoulders as they go out at right.*]

[*Exeunt Shakespeare and Southampton, followed by Florian.*]

[*Enter Peter.*]

PETER

[*Imitating Florian's movements.*] There! My left leg around his leg—thus. His head under my arm—thus. My fists pommelling, and my right leg kicking—whatever of his other parts are at my convenience—thus!

[*Enter two pages.*]

FIRST PAGE

He has a fit! Call the Steward!

SECOND PAGE

He is mad! Lock him in the dark cellar! Steward! Steward!

PETER

Ah, pray you, Sirs, I have no fit. I but practice my defense of the court.

FIRST PAGE

He is a Natural.

SECOND PAGE

His defense of the court! He thinks he is in wild Scotland where they kill men for sport at supper.

FIRST PAGE

And our office is given to him! I shall bite my nails with anger for a week.

[*Enter third page.*]

THIRD PAGE

My Lord Southampton commands you in the outer court.

[*Exit third page.*]

PETER

Before you go, tell me what like is my Lord Southampton, for I have not yet seen him. How is he favored? Dark or light? How may I know him?

FIRST PAGE

[*To second page, drawing him aside.*] Now hear how I will set a trap for him that he may never take our honor from us again. [*To Peter.*] You may know him by his being a little man, fat and scrubby. His hair is coal black and he wears it short like a priest, and he has a small black mustache on his upper lip, like a Frenchman. He carries no sword but always a green parrot on his left wrist.

PETER

Now can I never mistake him!

SECOND PAGE

[*Looking down the alley, speaks to the first*

page aside.] Quick! Hide here with me, and see what follows.

[*The two pages go to right as if to go out, but hide behind a column.*]

THE PAGES

Farewell, Peter! Defend the court, Peter!

PETER

[*Looks about the court, and down the alley at left back.*] Someone comes! O—he is a tall man—he carries a sword. A *very* tall man and of a masterful port. O! O! Hardy as I am, I am very vengeably afraid.

[*He gradually withdraws backward against the further wall. Southampton appears at end of alley.*]

PETER

Florian said—"speak to him a rough speech full of passions." But I have no passions! O, if my Mother were but here to teach me

language! But I will do the best I learned from her.

[*Enter Southampton.*]

PETER

[*Going toward him with a swagger.*] Your name, and business, Scullmullion!

SOUTHAMPTON

What have we here? Out of my way, monkey.

PETER

[*As if remembering a lesson.*] "If he answer not to your satisfaction——" [*He flies at Southampton and springing on him winds his legs and arms around him, kicking and striking him.*] Learn not to trespass in the Earl of Southampton's house!

[*The two pages behind the column run away.*]

[*Enter Florian.*]

SOUTHAMPTON

Here, Florian! Help me pull off this Devil-fish, all legs and arms!

[*Florian pulls Peter away.*]

SOUTHAMPTON

[*To Peter.*] What do you mean by such lunacy?

PETER

[*Pointing to Florian.*] He bade me.

SOUTHAMPTON

What means he, Florian?

FLORIAN

My Lord, he has lived with sheep and cows all his life and has their understanding of English. I bade him keep intruders from the court, and not knowing your Lordship, this is his reading of my instructing.

SOUTHAMPTON

Chastise him well, Florian, that he may re-

member that well-meant mistakes are as dangerous as acts of evil intent. . . . Bestow those seats with more dignity. Place one on the highest dais as if it were a throne, and wait me here.

[*Exit Southampton.*]

FLORIAN

O Pierre, Pierre, you preserve your own integrity at the expense of that of others, and yet persist in calling your kind of truth a virtue!

[*He catches Peter by the collar and strikes him with his wand. Peter half eludes him, running away a few steps, but Florian catches him again.*]

That was a fine recoil and the slant of your body at this moment better drawn than the leaning tower of Pisa.

[*Fanfare of trumpets without. The musicians re-enter balcony. Florian releases Peter.*]

Help me, Pierre!

[*They arrange the chairs on the dais as Southampton directed. A festal march is played. Enter musicians and guests. A page calls the names as they enter and take their places on the dais. Southampton enters first and directs them to their places.*]

PAGE

Lord Herbert. The Countess of Rutland. Lady Bridget Manners. The Earl of Rutland.

[*Southampton leads all but Lady Bridget Manners to the foremost seats on the lowest steps of the dais. Then he takes Lady Bridget's hand. She has pale golden hair and is dressed in white.*]

SOUTHAMPTON

In Joust and Tourney of our elder custom,
There ever was a Queen of Love and Beauty.
Fair Sweetest, be our Queen and crown our winning.

[*He tries to lead her to the chair at the top of the dais.*]

BRIDGET

[*Drawing back.*] My place is by my Mother's side, my Lord.

COUNTESS OF RUTLAND

Such is my wish, my Lord, and my command.

[*Lady Bridget takes the chair beside the Countess of Rutland.*]

SOUTHAMPTON

[*With impatience and annoyance.*]
'Tis fighting against barriers indeed!

[*During this dialogue, Elisabeth Vernon with a gentlewoman-in-waiting enters at left. Elisabeth advances and then withdraws to left and listens with concentrated attention until Lady Bridget takes her place by the Countess of Rutland. Elisabeth wears a dress of ruby*

colored brocade with a front of white and gold and pearls; a standing lace ruff and jewels in her dark hair. The Earl of Essex enters at left and they advance together, the gentlewoman following.]

PAGE

Mistress Elisabeth of Vernon, and The Earl of Essex.

SOUTHAMPTON

Welcome, noble cousins! Essex, stay here. Fair Mistress Vernon, wait!

[*Essex stands by the chair on the second step of the dais that Southampton has indicated and Elisabeth Vernon stands alone in centre.*]

SOUTHAMPTON

[*Pointing to the chair on the top of the dais.*]

See—where there waits for you a queenless
throne!
Have pity, pray you, on our Headless State!

ELISABETH

[*With mocking raillery.*]

A throne a-begging in a world like ours,
Where every woman dreams herself a queen!
'Twould sure be reckless waste. Where is
my crown?

SOUTHAMPTON

In Love's sweet kingdom 'tis the Queen gives
crowns,
Wearing them not. Be thou our generous
Queen.

ELISABETH

Risk no fair titles till my reign be tested!

[*Southampton leads her to the top of the dais. She sits and intently watches Southampton. The musicians in the balcony continue the festal march while other guests enter. The page continues*

to announce them, but his voice is drowned by the music. A trumpeter sounds a call to arms. Essex and four noblemen take their places on the farther side of the barrier. Southampton and four other noblemen stand in the foreground on the side of barrier nearest to the audience. The pages divest them of their ruffs, cloaks and upper doublets and they stand in their white silk blouses and trunks and hose. The pages give them swords.]

SOUTHAMPTON

[*To Herbert, with solicitude.*]

Where now is Will? I shall not play without him.

[*Enter slowly down the clipped alley at back, Shakespeare. He passes the others until he comes to Southampton. As he enters, Elisabeth Vernon turns and fixes her eyes upon him, and as he passes her he turns slowly, as if forced*

to do so, and looks fixedly into her eyes; then passes on.]

SOUTHAMPTON

[*Taking a sword from a page and holding it out to Shakespeare.*]

Fight on my side, Sweet Will, that I may win.

SHAKESPEARE

Though love is free, I am not of your caste.
I am a player, yet—I will not play.
All that takes place upon the earth requires
A watcher. Let me watch.

SOUTHAMPTON

[*With anger.*] A subtle stab
And undeserved. Who does not know that Genius
Is of the highest, rarest caste of Heaven!

SHAKESPEARE

We're on the earth! But be not hurt, Southampton,

Nor weight me with your pity, for I joy
In the still watch I keep, more than you can
In all your straining play.

[*The trumpeter sounds a second call to arms. The combatants stand at attention. Shakespeare stands alone at left near front and watches Elisabeth Vernon. The game begins. Florian and Peter are in the foreground at right.*]

FLORIAN

[*To Peter.*] Now there'll be sport!
Behold the Lady Bridget.—She's as pure
And cool as is a snowdrop in chill March—
A Morning Flower! But there above her gleams
A Beauty of Mysterious Night. Mark how
Her dark regard burns on Southampton, yet
He feels it not, as ever low he bends
To pluck his white Bud from the Fields of Dawn.

[*The musicians play. Essex and his men overpower Southampton and his fol-*

lowers and drive them back from the barrier. But Essex is thrown down by Southampton. Excitement among the guests. The musicians stop playing.]

COUNTESS OF RUTLAND

The game is over-rough, my Lords, methinks.

SOUTHAMPTON

Madam, the Queen's great father and your king
Much loved the game.

ELISABETH

Men love not play with toys!
Am I called Queen? Then let the game go on.

[*Shakespeare has watched only Elisabeth. Now he turns wholly to Southampton. They fight again. Southampton and his men overpower Essex and his band. The button on Essex's*

sword comes off. Southampton tries to elude him, but Essex, in a frenzy of excitement, forces him to fight, and Southampton is suddenly wounded in the right arm. Shakespeare has gradually drawn nearer and nearer to Essex and Southampton.]

COUNTESS OF RUTLAND

[*Rising.*]

Witness! I prophesied brutality!

ELISABETH

[*Also rising.*]

Superb! Ah! how I thrill with ecstasy!
A sight worth living for in our tame world!

[*As Essex's sword button falls off, Shakespeare springs into the grassy arena.*]

SHAKESPEARE

O dangerous Force! Foul play!

[*He seizes Essex by the arm and wrests his sword from him.*]

SOUTHAMPTON

[*Gaily.*] I thank you, Essex.
Small wounds may turn great cowards into heroes.

ELISABETH

[*Hurriedly descending from her seat at the top of the dais with a cry of alarm.*]
How should I dream that blood was drawn!
[*She draws close to Southampton. Her voice breaks with emotion.*]

ELISABETH

He bleeds!
[*She turns angrily to Essex.*]
Robert, this is more like a dastard's trick
Than noble sport between two gentlemen.

ESSEX

Lash me not more, my cousin, with your tongue

Than does the heart within me, though my hand
And hasty head oft play it false!
[*To Southampton.*]
Pardon!

SOUTHAMPTON

[*Laughing.*]
How may one pardon when there is no sin!

ELISABETH

You bleed!

[*She tears the soft muslin and lace scarf from her shoulders and binds Southampton's arm with passionate solicitude. Essex watches her with an angry frown. The guests on the dais are grouped together; some watching Southampton and Elisabeth, some talking together with excitement. Herbert has drawn Shakespeare aside at left and they confer apart, not observing that Elisabeth has bound*

Southampton's arm. They now come forward. During this scene the pages are rapidly re-dressing the combatants. Elisabeth takes a crimson ribbon from her dress and fastens it on Southampton's arm.]

ELISABETH

An honor fairly won. Your knights,
And you, had triumphed, 'ere my cousin's sword
Pierced you with such unlicensed cruelty.

[*Southampton drops on one knee, takes Elisabeth's hand and kisses it, bending low. Pembroke stands near. Essex and Shakespeare at some little distance observing all that happens.*]

ESSEX

[*Turning slightly away sings sneeringly in a low voice, but with great distinctness.*]

"Every ass
Must have his grass,
And every fool his favor!"

[*The group in centre turn to look at Essex with confused surprise, as if not catching the words.*]

SHAKESPEARE

And had you won the favor, Essex, speak—
Which title would best fit *you,* fool or ass?

ESSEX

[*Instinctively feeling for his sword, which Shakespeare still holds, and then making a gesture of anger.*]

Poets may safely jest with empty scabbards!

SHAKESPEARE

[*Handing him his sword.*]

While Earls may never trifle with full brains!

ESSEX

Mine has a memory for more than verses,
E'en such as yours, and punctuates reminders
With the rash blood of masquerading rustics,
As Ireland and Tyrone shall attest.

SHAKESPEARE

Yet, in a universe where nothing counts
Except the soul, I doubt not, Essex, that
We two shall meet one day on equal ground.
Pray you recall this when you match yourself
One day against the masquerading rustic.

[*While Shakespeare and Essex are talking, Florian helps Southampton dress. A fanfare of trumpets. Enter a page.*]

PAGE

My Lords, the banquet waits!

SOUTHAMPTON

Follow me, friends,
And drink to skill at arms, and knightliness,
To put King Arthur's Table to the blush!

[*Exit all at right, but the pages, Essex, Elisabeth Vernon and her gentlewoman. The pages begin to dress Essex. Essex shows his impatience at being dressed. One page tries to fasten a knee ribbon; another kneels, attaching the clasp of his shoe which has come undone in the game; another tries to put on an upper garment; and a fourth to replace his ruff.*]

ESSEX

[*Struggling to free himself.*]

Off, louts! You finger me and cling like leeches.

Off! Off! Out of my way! Out of my way!

[*He flings the pages aside and springs toward the exit, his cloak hanging from one shoulder, his ruff unfastened, and his whole dress in disorder.*]

ESSEX

Elisabeth!

[*Elisabeth has just reached the exit and turns when she hears his voice. She returns to him.*]

ELISABETH

I listen, Robert. Speak.

ESSEX

[*With rough vigor, but with great kindness.*]

Cousin, that I have love for you, you know;
That I have pride in you, you guess; and yet
All that which pride breeds in my blood for you
Is still a warning unforeseen. Should I
Unveil my heart, you'd find two images,
My wife's and yours, enshrined there each by each;
Yet neither form usurps the other's place—
Each holds her own. She first, you next,

And claiming both my staunchest champion-
ing
Should there be need of such. What are
your years?
For, I forget their sum;—so rich, so large,
So lavish is your burgeoning, you seem
Even to me, who am of your own race,
One of those women, rarest on the earth,
Who have no youth, nor age, when woman-
hood
Has ripened them; and yet—you are a
woman
With all a woman's weakness—all her fears,
And all her heritage of pain. As frail
As you are proud.

[*He speaks with earnest force, taking her hand in his.*]

You know that in our world
There are sharp lines that women such as you
May never cross. Once crossed, their white-
ness stained,
They may no more be white. No more re-
turn.

Guard yourself strictly. You stand near the
throne,
Where all eyes stare, and somewhat of seclu-
sion,
Of quietness and modest dignity,
Befits a woman of your rank and place.

ELISABETH

How glibly men debar a woman from
The air of freedom where they take their
pleasure!
How you would rend a woman who thus
dared
To caution you, or hedge about your will,
With mean precaution. Robert, know you
not
God has made women, as well as men, with
souls,
Bold and impassioned, daring all of life?
Born to consume themselves divinely in
A passion's flame, yet ever strong enough
To fling their passion, quite outworn, aside,
If some supreme ambition beckoned them
On to a fruitfuller field.

ESSEX

This is indeed
A man's stout spirit in a woman's breast.
The world has cruel handling for such!
Again, what is your age?

ELISABETH

Past twenty-two!

ESSEX

[*With irony.*]
The age of wisdom, Sweet, undoubtedly.
Certain the age when elder wisdom counts
For naught. No more of mine I'll waste.
[*Again roughly.*]
Of late, I've seen Southampton's eyes on you.

ELISABETH

[*With raillery.*]
On me! He has but two and they are fixed
On Bridget Manners. But you entertain.
Speak on.

ESSEX

His eyes are fixed on her, on you,
On every passing woman. Well I know
That bold, untrammeled, roving, gypsy eye!
The gambler's eye, with women. Marking them
As this or that most lucky card, to bring
Good fortune, it may be, and pleasure certainly.

ELISABETH

This of your friend! What then is friendship worth,
If you so strangely vilify Southampton?

ESSEX

He is my friend, and I am his, be sure;
His is the spirit and the blood that magnetize
Both men and women; for whose sunny touch,
Lighting their flesh-dulled Souls, they risk too much

Of wisdom and of wisdom's fruitful ways.
And yet he is of fair and blameless honor.
The brightest star in England's galaxy.
But where a woman is concerned, he is
A poisoned brand of swift, contagious fire.
[*He speaks fiercely.*]
Listen, Elizabeth. Were Southampton
To put the honor of one of my race
In jeopardy, my hand must redden with
His blood. Remember this, for I'll not tear
My heart out of its sheath again for you
To smile upon its two-edged pride, that cuts
Not for myself alone but for my race—
And you . . . The campaign into Ireland
Draws ever near, and should it be
Then I must leave you here alone
Without a kinsman's ward and guarding presence.

ELISABETH

[*Caressingly.*]
Ah, Powers above! What nobleness of heart

Now wrought upon to pain, without a cause!
Go speak these words to Bridget Manners, for
Southampton ever hovers over her
Pure, fragrant whiteness—the most daring bee
That ever boldly pillaged honey, in
June's palpitating balm.

[*She draws near to Essex and peers with mockery and sweetness into his face.*]

What fierce, sad eyes!

ESSEX

[*Angrily.*]

Such siren words and ways but anger me.

[*Elisabeth stands motionless with drooping head, all sudden gentleness. She puts her arms about his neck. Essex looks at her a moment and then speaks with tenderness.*]

Forgive me, Beautiful—Most beautiful—
Only do not forget! Go to your friends.

[*He releases her arms—kissing her*

hands. She smiles into his face with confident strength. Exit Elisabeth with her gentlewoman.]

ESSEX

Now could I win Southampton's pledge to go
With me to Ireland and hasten the campaign,
So might this danger pass. The glittering bait
Of Cecil's pending embassy to Paris
Has captivated quite his youthful eye,
And when the lure of pleasure fills his sight,
How may a battle-field dissolve the spell?
[*Enter Southampton.*]

SOUTHAMPTON

Most fortunately met! When the night falls
And all my guests are gone, I pray you, Essex,
Meet me here. I would speak with you secretly
Upon the scheme you late dropped in my ear.

ESSEX

[*With intense eagerness.*]
You'll go with me to Ireland?

SOUTHAMPTON

I swear
My blood is half asleep in England now,
Sickening at games for ladies—though they be
Lilies and roses all, to make men drunk
With rich allurement! Briefly, I must go
To Paris first with Cecil—then with you
To Ireland. Your wild adventure there,
Even in thought, quickens my blood and brain.

ESSEX

When do you go to France?

SOUTHAMPTON

For yet awhile
I am held here. Mere Flower-Bonds, indeed!

Yet not too quickly broken, since my word
Is pledged in diverse ways to divers men.
Yet I may bring all circuits to a close
Before June's dew-steeped nights are gently past.

[*Sound of music and carousal at right.*]

I may not linger now. At ten o'clock
I'll meet you here.

ESSEX

My word on it. At ten,
Yonder I'll walk alone in the yew path,
Lacking to-day the small neat speech most meet
For little ladies' ears at feasts.

[*Exit Essex by the clipped alley at back. Enter Shakespeare from right. Sound of music and laughter without.*]

SOUTHAMPTON

Ah, Will!
Sweet Will, at sight of you *my* will dissolves!
I thought to play the Host, but now instead

I'll let them laugh and drink of earthly wine;
We'll quaff a finer vintage of the soul.
Your eyes are clouded, that should be
Clear as your mind's unfathomed deeps.
Whence comes the cloud? I'll penetrate it too!

SHAKESPEARE

Who knows where clouds are born? To know them mists,
Formed out of air and dew intangible,
Dissolving ever into mists again,
Is all we need to know. So can we bear
Their blinding.

SOUTHAMPTON

Blind me not with imagery,
However fair. Turn your thoughts homeward now?

SHAKESPEARE

Not now alone, but ever more and more,
For there are loves and griefs too keen and strong

To sleep. The cords that bind me there are
tightening.
They cannot break and soon must draw me
back
To Stratford—to my children and—my wife.

SOUTHAMPTON

Beseech you, go not hence! Illume us here.
Too much in this our time by greatness gone
Have we been overcast. Greece dead, Rome
past—
You live! Filling our beauty-craving hearts,
Quickening our dying hopes and dead ideals,
The age's richness lives within your sway,
Joy of the hour and splendor of the past.

SHAKESPEARE

There's splendor in such homage! Royal
State
In praise so nobly lavished—so unselfed.
What have I to return? Only this truth—
You and one other hold my heart—its life
To damn or bless. Its only sustenance

To give and serve. Should danger menace
you,
I'd snatch you hence. Should Hatred lurk
to strike,
It must strike me and spend its venom here,
And reach you, if it must, a stingless thing!

SOUTHAMPTON

[*Musingly.*]

I and one other hold his heart. But who
Can have the power or art so to enslave
A King?

SHAKESPEARE

No art, but power infinite.
An orb of fire—so full of light and heat
That ev'n her careless rays cause whatsoe'er
They fall upon to live and grow and bloom
For her alone; for if their light be gone,
Such revel of life once known, loss would be
death.
Fire oft without light like those dark rays
Of our known sun, which stream to earth's
deep centre,

Dark, lightless rays, yet giving life to all,
Who dwell upon Earth's surface. A Flame
of Life!

SOUTHAMPTON

In Heaven's truth, some goddess of his
dreams!

SHAKESPEARE

Dreams are but—dreams! . . . My
goddess is—a woman.

SOUTHAMPTON

This is no sylvan maid nor London courtesan.

SHAKESPEARE

I said an orb of fire. Orbs dwell beyond our
ken
In the bright firmament above, to which
We lift our aching eyes.

SOUTHAMPTON

Ah—raves he thus
Of some court lady or some princess, seen

But never yet approached? This well may be.
'A Poet's fancy, from which poems spring.
Dream on your fill and let me share your dream?

SHAKESPEARE

In sleep last night I sailed upon the sea
And felt its briny spray upon my cheek;
Tasted and swallowed it, as 'twere salt tears—
A woman's tears—a maddening, bitter-sweet,
And I am water-wild to-day, and so
Let me alone!

SOUTHAMPTON

Sweet Will, forgive, I pray.
Love should share all—ev'n dreams!

SHAKESPEARE

This, if a dream,
Is one that I must dream alone—alone—
To its fore-destined waking; for we wake,

Be sure, be very sure, from every sleep,
However deep and sweet and long it be.
[*After short pause.*]
How fares your princely suit to Bridget Manners?

SOUTHAMPTON

My flower of dawn! My vestal dove! She's mine!
By every timid, virgin sign. And soon
I'll woo her fresh lips to confess their truth,
And take their first love-blossom with my own.
[*Enter a messenger from the Globe Theatre.*]

MESSENGER

[*Obsequiously.*]
Your pardon, noble Lord and Master Will,
That I do so intrude—

SHAKESPEARE

We have stout hearts
And survive the intrusion. Speak its cause.
[*The messenger bows low.*]

MESSENGER

The Earl of Merton at whose country seat
You purposed with your company to play
A fortnight hence, before the Queen and Court,
Has sent in haste to say the play must be
Next week—'Tis so the Queen herself commands;
To-night our wagons and our company
Must start, and this too sudden going hence
For the Earl's play and for our month-long tour
Has thrown our people into mad confusion.
They wildly run about like hens and geese
Into whose very midst a fox has sprung.
Your steadying presence can alone compel
Order and calmness there.

SHAKESPEARE

Go—Tell my flock
I will be with them soon, within an hour.
Fly—so their minds may rest!

[*He gives the Messenger a piece of gold.*]

MESSENGER

A generous heart!

[*Exit Messenger.*]

SOUTHAMPTON

You go—you go to-night?

SHAKESPEARE

For but a month!

SOUTHAMPTON

Forget not you are pledged to me in June.
Then falls the Masque at Tichfield, where I'll cause
Such Faery-Magic to bewitch each sense
That you shall dream my dream the only truth;
One mystic night not linked to Fact or Time.
I have your pledge? You will be with me then?
Upon your holy word, than which I count
Nothing more sacred.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Laughing.*]

Over-earnest heat
Over a trifling thing! Am I not pledged?

[*Enter Florian at back carrying a silver casket. He sings.*]

FLORIAN'S SONG

I

Mighty Venus, mightier Love,
Help who weareth this Disguise—
Help him, Heavenly Powers above!
Guard, where deadly peril lies.

II

Mask his face and mask his heart;
Hide him from her dangerous eyes;
Shield him, lest Love's fiery dart,
Find its Billet and—he dies!

SOUTHAMPTON

There singing goes my most familiar sprite.
A quaint youth, full of odd imagination.
I'll question and he'll something strange reply.
Where go you Florian? Come close and tell.

FLORIAN

To place this casket in your private room.
Thanking your Lordship for your trust in me—
Yet knowing well your Lordship fords a stream
As well upon a Jackass as a Racer—
Or Peter Dumpser would not be *my* mate!

SOUTHAMPTON

What did I say? Bring me the casket here.

[*Southampton unlocks the casket, while Florian retires to some distance and waits. Southampton takes out a courtier's costume of black with a lace*

collar and the jewelled chain, star and blue ribbon of the order of the Garter, also a black mask. To Shakespeare.]

I'll whisper in your ear what no one here
May know, save only you and Florian.
Hide deep my jest. The evening of the Masque
I shall be garbed in this mysterious black,
Wearing th' insignia of the Star and Garter,
And further closely masked in black.
There are three Garters living now in England,
And all will come to my June revelry,
And thus to mystify my curious guests
Will cause confusion and amazing haps;
For all these men have plots, amours and schemes.

[*Laughter of guests approaching is heard.*]

A VOICE WITHOUT

[*At right.*]

Southampton—Come!

SOUTHAMPTON

They call, and I must go!

[*He touches the costume and casket.*]

Go—place these, Florian, in my cabinet,
And bring me here the key.

[*Voices without, at right.*]

Southampton—Come!

SOUTHAMPTON

[*To Shakespeare.*]

You stay an hour?

SHAKESPEARE

One hour stol'n from time!

[*Exit Southampton, at right.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Taking jewels and costume in his hands and examining them, while Florian still waits respectfully at a little distance.*]

Ah!—What delicious tangles would ensue,

If I should clothe myself that Faery night
In black, the twin of this—the hat, the mask,
The semblance of these gems, this chain—
this Star!
I pledge the genius of sweet mystery
That so I will—no matter what befall!

[*Florian approaches and with Shakespeare replaces the costume and jewels in the casket.*]

I'll bear this with you, Florian; lock it safe.
Then speed you with the key back to the Earl.

[*Exit Shakespeare and Florian with the casket by a low door at left that opens directly on a winding stair.*]

[*Enter Southampton and Bridget Manners from right.*]

SOUTHAMPTON

When have I not thus loved you, Bridget?
Dear,
I am but young in years, but old in feeling.
My love for you has not been yesterday
Nor yester year—but always—as you know.

Why, then, spend words on what my life has told?
Give the sweet answer which my blood foretells.

BRIDGET

Alas, you force hard truth when gentleness
Is what I fain would proffer you!

SOUTHAMPTON

Hard truth?

BRIDGET

How may one make denial sweet?

SOUTHAMPTON

[*Incredulously.*] Denial?

BRIDGET

I am not meant for you, nor you for me.

SOUTHAMPTON

What folly's here?

BRIDGET

I must take courage to speak!

SOUTHAMPTON

[*With agitation.*]

Wherefore this—

BRIDGET

[*Calmly.*]

You are too volatile,
Too young, and something too fantastical
For me to trust myself—my life—to you.
While that my Mother lives, all might go well;
But if she were to die, [which God forefend,]
I doubt your carriage of yourself. I speak
From observation.

SOUTHAMPTON

[*With violent agitation and anger.*]

Ah! From observation!
O hideous and worldly-wise admission!
While I have giv'n you all I had of love—
Poured out my heart's whole treasure at your feet,
You have been peering,—conning o'er my faults.

What are you? Why, I've hated women that
do
Such things.

BRIDGET

And you? Are you perfection's self
That none can find a fault? I have been told
Of women you have cruelly harmed and left.

SOUTHAMPTON

What bitterness and hate submerge my soul!

BRIDGET

If that your love so quickly turns to hate,
Was it then ever love?

SOUTHAMPTON

Are you a vixen
Whom I thought a dove? Oh,—I have been
Deluded by my wealth of tenderness
For you. It is not that I have not sinned—
I have. But all such sinning is so much
The custom of the only world I know,
That, in the rash and headlong heats of youth,

I scarcely knew it sinning, till I looked
Within the Heaven of your purest eyes,
And I believed that their divinity
Would quite absolve my sins. O God! O God!
O sweet, first flush of boyhood's bloom and hope!
Gone, gone—
[*He weeps. Then after a short pause speaks again.*]
'Tis done—forever done—and you—
Be sure that you shall cost me no more tears—
And if we meet the morrow, as we may,
For streams that long have flowed in parallels
Are not too quickly parted, you shall feel
How cold the night has been.

BRIDGET

[*Calmly.*] Such coldness holds
Contagion—so 'tis said. Farewell, my Lord.
I seek my mother, and with her, my home.

[*They bow ceremoniously. Exit Bridget at right.*]

SOUTHAMPTON

No one shall know my hurt,—not even Will—
Already it is old as Death, and rots
Within my flesh. I'll cut the fester out,
And let quick Life refill the empty place
With, if need be, a myriad living loves!
Give me a woman of blood and fire and heart,
However rash or sinning, so she *feel!*
Yes—such a woman as draws near me now!

[*Enter Elisabeth with a paper in her hand, which she is reading. It begins to grow dark. Southampton bows low to Elisabeth.*]

Lady, why do you veil your eyes' bright beams
For filthy ink?

ELISABETH

[*Crushing the paper in her hand.*]
This screed, my Lord, is trash!

SOUTHAMPTON

I'll wager you so name all words of men.

ELISABETH

Indeed, I never so named yours, my Lord.
You speak me few and write me none at all!

SOUTHAMPTON

I would not have them crushed, as you have
crushed
Those writ upon the paper that you hold.

ELISABETH

Do you so doubt all women? It is sung
By every bird on every bush that maids
Are wisest when they doubt all words of
yours.

[*Enter Essex from right.*]

ESSEX

[*To Elisabeth, with sternness.*]

Cousin, I'll see you home. The night is dark.

ELISABETH

[*With gaiety and sweetness.*]

Such guardianship were chivalry itself!
But I'm companioned here by Lady Rutland,
By her daughter and my gentlewoman.
I will go hence with them. My carriage waits.

ESSEX

[*Abruptly.*]

The Gods protect you! You will have your way.

[*Exit Essex at left.*]

[*It grows darker.*]

[*Enter Herbert. He approaches the table where there are flagons of wine and glasses. He pours and drinks several times. He then goes toward Elisabeth.*]

HERBERT

[*To Elisabeth.*]

Where may I find your Cousin Essex, Lady?

ELISABETH

[*Mockingly.*]

He flees our gaiety, and with a frown
Departed by that door a moment since.

[*While Herbert has spoken with Elisabeth, guests have entered from right with pages, who light them across the court with flambeaux. The pages then place the flambeaux in sockets at the sides of the court.*]

GUESTS

[*To Southampton.*]

Good-night, my Lord!

SOUTHAMPTON

[*Going to guests, as Herbert speaks to Elisabeth.*]

The Stars attend your path!

[*To Elisabeth.*]

Your pardon, Lady!

[*Exit Southampton with guests at left. Lady Rutland and Bridget Manners*

cross the court attended by a page with a flambeau.]

HERBERT

[*Who has been again drinking at the table, to Elisabeth.*]

I would speak with Essex.

ELISABETH

Be quick and stay him in the outer court.

HERBERT

My thanks. [*With exaggerated courtesy.*]

Vouchsafe that I attend you

Back to the banquet-hall.

ELISABETH

[*Aside, with raillery.*]

Ah me! Ah me!

A woman scarce may draw her breath alone!

[*Exit Elisabeth and Herbert at right.*]

[*Enter Shakespeare from the door opening on the stair at left. He holds a*

paper in his hand on which he is writing. He comes forward and slowly crosses terrace to the right. He stops writing and the lightly held paper slips from his fingers near the column at right front. He stops.]

SHAKESPEARE

Poor Leaf! Thou doest well to fall to earth!
The mighty tree that trembling bore thy life
Is still forbid by Heaven to nourish thee.
My Love is strength unlicensed and fore-
doomed
To pain. Yet since by its illuming fire
I live—along this flaming pathway must
My soul, if it be true to truth, be hurled.
Great God!—Why should I waste my life in
words,
When all the force that moves this Universe
Of worlds and suns, whirls on my Soul to
act?
Yet, lest Love-Madness quite destroy my
brain,

I'll give my passion speech, though its just fruit
Be balked and turned to tragedy within.
O woe as old as Earth!
[*With a sudden change.*]
Yet for the Love,
The Love, let God be praised!
[*Enter from right, Elisabeth reading the paper she held in her hand before. She has thrown a long, dark cloak over her shoulders.*]

SHAKESPEARE

Ah!
[*He steps behind the column near by. Elisabeth sees him and, starting, drops the paper she holds. It falls near the sonnet.*]

ELISABETH

[*With mockery.*] Do you seek
To hide from me? Am I so dread a thing?
So to be feared?

SHAKESPEARE

[*Motionless in the shadow of the column and speaking with deep, restrained feeling.*]

There are prisoners,
Lady, who are forbid to go in th' sun.

ELISABETH

Who is't has prisoned you?

SHAKESPEARE

Myself—my life.

ELISABETH

Why! Life is full of open doors.—Escape!

SHAKESPEARE

I have no right nor power to break my bonds.

ELISABETH

Still behind bars! Shall I release you? See!
'Tis simple and as quick as breathing.

[*She moves swiftly to him and, taking his hand, draws him from the shadow of the column.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*As she takes his hand.*]

Ah!——

[*He stands motionless again as if in a trance. Elisabeth sees the paper he has dropped and, stooping, picks it up. Shakespeare makes a slight movement to stop her and then stands as before.*]

ELISABETH

What's here? This bears my name—therefore 'tis mine.

[*She reads.*]

To my dark Heaven's Star, Elisabeth.
"Farewell, thou art too dear for my possessing,
And like enough thou knowest thy estimate
The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing;
My bonds in thee are all determinate.
For how do I hold thee but by thy granting?

[*She reads indistinctly. Then clearly again.*]

So thy great gift, upon misprision growing,
Comes home again, on better judgment making.
Thus have I had thee, as a dream doth flatter,
In sleep a king, but, waking, no such matter."

[*Angrily.*]

Your dream has carried you too far! Too far!

[*She tears the sonnet to pieces.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Springing forward and snatching the torn bits of paper from her hand.*]

Women are all alike! O stay your hand!
You know not what you tear. When this proud Hall,
These shafts of hardest stone, have crumbled quite,
And all the pride of Times to come is dead
And buried in a too-forgotten past,
These words will live.

[*He stoops and picks up the paper she dropped.*]

Let me see what you read
So ardently but now and treasured, though
You would destroy my verse!

[*He reads from a small printed sheet.*]

The Never-present Writer to the Ever-present Reader:
Be it known to the ladies of this realm that

[*Here he reads with mocking, ironical emphasis.*]

"The *power* of cloth of gold is now less *powerful* than a month agone. An *insufficiency* of pink satin causes blue satin, with cuts laced with silver, to hold *sway*. Side sleeves lie flatter to the *sight* and skirts have a *brightness* from binding with gold tinsel. Ruffs have become a *very refuse* unless set with Pearls——"

[*He flings the paper on the table and laughs loudly.*]

Ha! Ha! We look and look in women's eyes
And plunge our souls into their liquid deeps

And dream the heavenly bath holds balm
divine,
Tinctured with wisdom most celestial,
The solvent for our world-tormented lives.
We look behind the azure or the gray—
The color matters not—the eye is all—
And in its depths discern—a Fashion Book!
O—O—I could both curse and weep to know
For what slight things men stake immortal
souls!

ELISABETH

[*With ironical approval.*]

Well done! Very well done! Most sharply
said!
You whet your cutting wit successfully
On yon poor sheet and—me!

[*She sits on the circular stone bench by the stone table and leans on it, looking up at Shakespeare, who still stands.*]

But, an you please,
Have you observed in Pleasance or in Hall,

Where these same men, our Lords by nature
—wise
And strong,—of course!—of course!—
Where do they go?
Straight to the bird who has the brightest
plumes,
To her whose wit and beauty are enhanced
So richly and so sweetly that they seem
A treasure doubly rare. Ah, Master Will!
Our Spring is brief; our kingdom—Hearts
of men.
You curse our eyes—but to your hearts, our
road
Must lie through yours—fickle and beauty-
led!
[*With a sudden change to gentle earnest-
ness.*]
But you are angered—I have torn your
verse!

SHAKESPEARE

I angered? Madam, there are times when
men
Use anger as a sword to kill a pain

Within the heart—as sharp as death, yet sweet
As honey from the blooms of Paradise.

[*He impetuously takes one of the flambeaux and places it near the table. He sits on the bench and takes the fashion paper in his hand.*]

Hidden within these paltry, silly words
I'll find another sonnet which will hold
My answer and your pardon.

[*He bends over the paper, marking the words.*]

ELISABETH

[*Taking her writing tablet, which hangs from her chatelaine.*]

Sport for two!
See—dreaming here for many a day there lie
Unwritten missives that await my touch
To give them life.

[*She examines a leaf of the Tablet.*]

Here's one that bears your name!

[*She writes. Peter Dumpser enters*

from right, extinguishes two of the flambeaux, crosses the court and, opening the door to the stair that leads to Southampton's room, goes up, leaving the door ajar. He is examining a letter which he holds. Neither Shakespeare nor Elisabeth observe him.]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Marking the words in the paper, speaks without raising his head.*]

Now picture me, a man, playing the child!
But in this hour I am but seventeen!
Life, pristine and unstained, once more is mine.

ELISABETH

I've won! I've won the race! My screed is done!

SHAKESPEARE

We meet at the goal! I ended ere you spoke.

[*He draws nearer to her and indicates with his pencil the words he has marked, reading as he does so.*]

"Ah, from what *power* hast thou this *powerful* might
With *insufficiency* my heart to *sway?*
To make me give the *lie* to my true *sight,*
And swear that *brightness* doth not grace the day?
Whence hast thou this becoming of things ill,
That in the *very refuse* of thy deeds
There is such strength and warranties of skill,
That, in my mind, thy worst all best exceeds?"

ELISABETH

[*Interrupting.*]

I'll have no more! Call you this pardon? 'Tis
A stern forgiveness! I am gentler far
To you than you to me.

[*She reads from her tablet.*]

"You dazzle my wits. You confuse my understanding. You destroy my ambitions, yet fulfill my dreams. Did your rank in this world match your rank as a poet, there would

be a crown on your head and I the first to bow to it. For kings or principalities cannot compel my homage—Only to Heaven and Genius can I kneel."

SHAKESPEARE

[*Agitated.*]

Your words are flames
That mount in golden wreathings to my brain!

[*A page enters from right and extinguishes another flambeau, so that the court is lighted only by the moonlight and the flambeau beside the table. The page goes out at back.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Looks about, starts up, and speaks with still more agitation.*]

It is deep night;
See—every guest has gone! What blasting shame
To me if Scandal's mire should foul your name!

Where are your people? I will take you hence.

ELISABETH

[*Laughing lightly.*]

My carriage and my gentlewoman wait—
I will go soon! Rest here and let me speak.
What greater shame or sin than 'Twere to kill
The budding moment trembling to its bloom?
Who knows what this half-veiled, half-dawning hour
Holds for us both? You know not how enslaved
And smothered women are. You are so great
You bring me air. I pray you, let me breathe!

[*She sinks back luxuriously in the seat and looks up pleadingly at Shakespeare. He has stood with an air of impatient anxiety. At her last words, he makes a step toward her.*]

ELISABETH

[*Motioning to the seat beside her.*]

Sit here and let us talk like two old friends,
Who meet upon a summer afternoon.

[*Shakespeare sits on the bench.*]

Do you remember when almost a child,
I went in secret, masked, to hear your plays,
My soul then fed upon your mighty words
And knew their greatness of itself—and how,
Without the Play-House door I spoke with you?

SHAKESPEARE

[*With the same restrained feeling.*]

Do I remember!

ELISABETH

Ah! Such stolen hours
Give life to leaden days. We'll mark this one
By speaking only truth—and swiftly reach
A height we else might wait long years to gain.

[*A clock without strikes ten.*]

SHAKESPEARE

My hour stolen from time is at an end!
A million life-times could not tell the truth,
That bursts my heart!

ELISABETH

[*Without noticing his agitation.*]

I often marvel how that God has made,
A country boy—for such you must have been,
So greater than our greatest here—speak truth—
Do you not weary of the life we lead,
Shut in this town, playing the games of self,
And pride and gain and love? Do you not long
For the sweet breath of hills and fields and flowers—
The forest deeps—the simple folk you left?

SHAKESPEARE

It is not that I love not what I left—

But that old life fell from me like a cloak
When once the towers of London smote my eyes,
And all her mighty life beat at my heart;
And now her noble blood flows in my veins,
And I am one with all her great adventure.

ELISABETH

Is't true that you are married?

SHAKESPEARE

Fast as church law
And as man's law can bind me.

ELISABETH

And you love—
Your wife?

SHAKESPEARE

[*Starting from the bench, and speaking with agitation.*]

Can God forgive me if I lie
About my truth of truths? Will God forgive me

If I speak the truth and free my soul
From this relentless flame turned inward to
Destroy me?

[*He withdraws a few steps and puts his hand on his heart looking directly into Elisabeth's eyes.*]

I love *you*——

[*Elisabeth draws back as if startled but returns Shakespeare's look as if fascinated.*]

THE VOICE OF ESSEX

[*Just without at left.*]

Go tell the Earl
Of Southampton I wait him in the court.

A PAGE

[*Without at left.*]

Good, my Lord.

ELISABETH

[*Springing from her seat and clinging to Shakespeare with fright.*]

My Cousin Essex comes!
His rage would crush me if he finds me here—
I thought him gone an hour since. Hide me!

THE VOICE OF HERBERT

[*Without at right.*]
Is the Earl within?
Go seek him.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Taking Elisabeth's hand and with his other hand seizing the flambeau.*]
Come!

[*He quickly draws her across the court and opens the door on the stair and draws her after him, closing the door and leaving the stage in darkness as Essex and Herbert enter from opposite sides.*]

ACT III

SCENE II

[*The scene instantly changes to a small, panelled room lighted by a high standing lamp. A low door at left. Under a massive carved table Florian and Peter Dumpser are struggling and quarreling over a letter which Peter holds. On the table stands the silver casket which Florian carried, and an antique vase filled with roses. Also flagons of wine and goblets, a dish of fruit, and other viands. Swords and musical instruments and two or three portraits of beautiful women hang on the walls.*]

FLORIAN

[*Striking Peter.*]

O Treacherous Fox! You boast of your truth and virtue and steal my Lord's letters. Where is your consistency?

PETER

The letter bears my name.

FLORIAN

At last a wholesome lie! I have hopes of his honesty. [*He snatches the letter from Peter, and reads the inscription.*] "For my Lord Southampton." You little Viper! [*He strikes him again while Peter whines.*] If you were any bigger than a Whisper I should fight you to an end!

[*The door at left opens and Shakespeare stands in the entrance, bearing the flambeau. Behind him Elisabeth Vernon is seen.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*To Elisabeth, as he sees the pages.*]

Wait without, I pray you, while I dismiss these inopportune servants.

ELISABETH

[*With gaiety, drawing back into the shadow.*]

I am invisible!

[*Shakespeare shuts the door.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Roughly.*]

Out—both of you! When Lord Southampton learns that you fight in his cabinet he will give you the streets for your brawls.

[*Florian and Peter crawl from under the table.*]

FLORIAN

Please you, Master Shakespeare, I brought hither my Lord's casket as you bade me and found Peter Dumpser stealing my Lord's letters.

SHAKESPEARE

[*In a hushed tone of surprise.*]

Peter Dumpser!

FLORIAN

[*Giving the letter to Shakespeare.*]

Read the inscription, Master Shakespeare. Ah, this Field Lily, Pierre, is a little marble tomb of vice!

SHAKESPEARE

[*Taking the letter reads, aloud.*]

"For my Lord of Southampton in his house in Holborn in London. For his page Peter Dumpser." The letter is for Peter, Florian. Go you down the stair. If you are small enough and still enough, you may yet find standing room in this house. And as you pass out, you see and hear nothing. Do you understand my English? [*He pushes the unwilling Florian out and past the waiting Elisabeth.*]

[*To Elisabeth.*]

Your patience yet a moment, Lady.

[*He again shuts the door and returns to Peter.*]

Whence do you come?

PETER

From Stratford, Sir.

SHAKESPEARE

[*In the same hushed tone of surprise.*]

Thus do ghosts stand in our path,—to warn us of another world than this in which we live!

PETER

I knew you, Master Will, when I was but a Patch, but I feared to speak with you now that you are become so great a man.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Grasping his hand.*]

Country-born, and sunburned even as you, Peter! But you must follow your yoke-fellow and without delay. I'll speak you again.

PETER

My letter, Sir?

[*Shakespeare gives him the letter. Peter continues.*]

O, Master Will! I cannot read more than my own name. I dare not go to Florian for the spelling out of my letter, and the other pages gibe at me. This is from my mother, I

know. The first word I have had from her. Read it me, good Master Will.

[*He holds the open letter to Shakespeare, who half-unwillingly takes it.*]

PETER

[*Whining.*]

'Tis from my mother!

SHAKESPEARE

[*Good-humoredly.*]

Take your pap, then, while Queens wait. [*He reads.*] "To my much loved son Peter. The Fever has come to Stratford, though not so fierce as when my mother was young. I fell ill of it and quaked with fear, thinking to die without sight of you. Many have had the Fever and 'tis said Anne Shakespeare, that was Anne Hathaway, is one and hath died a week since. Her children are with her mother at Shottery and are well. I am mending but I would see you, Peter, for I cannot eat nor sleep for lacking sight of you. Come home,

Peter, for a space. Ask my Lord to spare you to your mother who is in such need of you."

[*After a long pause, Shakespeare speaks with awe.*]

Is Anne dead? Can that vivid life be ended? That vital tongue be still? God forgive my sins! I should have gone home before. . . . There will be years before this is a truth to me.

PETER

O, Master Shakespeare, will my Lord of Southampton let me go to my mother?

SHAKESPEARE

I will answer to Lord Southampton for you. Go to Stratford as speedily as may be. Here is gold for your journey. [*He gives him a purse.*]

PETER

[*Peeping into the purse.*]

Never saw I so much gold before. I can never spend it!

SHAKESPEARE

Stay beside your mother for a fortnight and then come to my Lord Southampton's seat in Titchfield. Look at me. Go to the house of Dame Hathaway in Shottery—and to the house of Anne Shakespeare in Stratford and bring me yourself news of—this fever. I write and go myself but I wish more certain and speedy news than the Queen's commands now permit. Do you understand?

PETER

I will do your bidding, Master Will, and I will bring tidings to Titchfield—if I am not struck by the fever myself, which the Angels forefend!

[*Exit Peter.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*At door. To Elisabeth with sternness.*]

Enter.

[*Elisabeth enters. She looks about and claps her hands and laughs.*]

'Tis Southampton's cabinet!
An adventure truly!

SHAKESPEARE

Do you trust
Yourself alone with me?

ELISABETH

You are a gentleman.

SHAKESPEARE

I am a man. And one that never knew
Himself to be a man until this hour.

ELISABETH

[*With an attempt at lightness.*]
Your eyes are wild. I almost fear you now.
[*With gravity.*]
And God forgot almost all kinds of fear
When He made me. Indeed I do not boast!

SHAKESPEARE

You asked me but a moment since,
To sit and talk like two old friends, who
meet

Upon a summer afternoon. And now,
I bid you stay and speak with me—not like
Old friends but like, (for imagery), two flames
That tremble upward, ever drawn more near
By very virtue of their light and fire.
Yearning to fuse in one fierce holocaust
Not caring if a world be thus consumed.

[*He leads her to a seat near the table. She sits. He stands near her, speaking rapidly.*]

I told you in the court below I had
A wife. (slowly) I *had* a wife—'tis said she's dead . . .
If I should come to you quite free—with hands
As clean as shriven love could make them, with
A name quite low—Yet in the years to come
With somewhat of a light upon it—Could you
Crowned, golden, nimbus-like with love—with love!

Such love as I give you,—Could you then dream
Of loving too? Of drinking of the wine
That Life pours out but once—the wine of Love.

ELISABETH

[*With light gaiety.*]

Without such dreams how very dull and tame
How very flat this life of ours would be!

SHAKESPEARE

You jest. You know not how such jesting stabs!

ELISABETH

Is it not wisest thus to jest with the Impossible?

SHAKESPEARE

Enough. I have my sentence.

[*He goes quickly toward the door.*]

ELISABETH

[*Rising and following him, lays her hand on his arm.*]

Master Will! [*Shakespeare returns.*] I answered not the truth!

SHAKESPEARE

Tigress! All glowing hues—all softened curves,
In motion how alluring your perfection!
And yet as you thus clutch again your prey
This laceration
[*He touches his heart*]
Speaks your touch to be
That of the jungle and the hidden lair.

ELISABETH

[*Sits and looks up at him with a sudden air of girlish softness and sweetness.*]
None ever spoke such cruel words to me!
Such needless, cruel words. God's truth it is
I love you, Master Will.

[*Shakespeare snatches the petals from one of the roses and flings them over her. They fall on her head and shoulders in a rosy shower.*]

SHAKESPEARE

This joy's too great!
This flaming whirl within my brain and heart
Blurs all before me. Let me see your eyes.
[*He sits near her, looking into her eyes as she looks up at him.*]
Such lakes of limpid candour! With a light
That blinds me. Is't for me or for the love
Of love and life? Elisabeth—Could you,
A Star, so drop from out your sphere to me?

ELISABETH

Stars drop through space and none know where they fall.
Should I so fall, T'would be to find myself
Throned in another Heaven of your love.

SHAKESPEARE

[*With fiery exaltation.*]
Your words are treasures sought and bought with blood
And travail of men's souls, for ages past;
Like argosies of spoils from fabled lands—

And I am glad of them, as one who finds
His Golden Fleece after long quest and war.
[*He takes her hands in his.*]
Can such eyes lie? Can the sweet, madding touch
Of these delicious hands be false?
I'll not believe it, though my heart cries out
In blackest doubt that flings me down to hell.
[*He speaks with impassioned entreaty.*]
Is't true that you love me? Search well your heart.

ELISABETH

[*With the same girlish candor.*]
There's nothing high in me—and yet I love
The heights. You lift me to them!

SHAKESPEARE

[*With passionate impatience.*]
That's not love.

ELISABETH

Among the men who court me there's not one
With whom my life could know a moment's peace.

You are so noble—and I trust you so!
When men are matched with men—not names
or lands—
In all our England, who so great as you?

SHAKESPEARE

[*Completely softened, speaks brokenly.*]
An unknown, country lad—a scribbling
youth
Who crawled foot-sore and hungry London
streets,
With but the visions in his plays for friends
And retinue. Can you love such an one?

ELISABETH

Romance is in it!

SHAKESPEARE

Trifle not—the truth!

ELISABETH

Indeed I love you—or—I know not love!
I should be dull if I loved not such greatness!
[*Shakespeare draws her to him.*]

SHAKESPEARE

Seal then your words in spirit and in touch
That do not lie.

[*He kisses her. A long kiss on her lips. She repulses him angrily.*]

Now know that you are mine.
Mine in the heart's quick beat. Mine in the life!

ELISABETH

[*With anger.*]
You dare too far!

SHAKESPEARE

[*Flinging himself on his knees at her feet.*]

If I too fiercely crushed
Those living roses of your lips with mine—
Too deeply drained their honey, let my plea
For your forgiveness be a life-long thirst.

[*Elisabeth, half irresolutely, holds out her hand. He kisses it reverently and, rising, stands at a little distance. The door is suddenly opened, and South-*

ampton enters. He stands in motionless astonishment as he sees Elisabeth and Shakespeare.]

SOUTHAMPTON

[*To Elisabeth, with irony.*]

Lady—you strangely honor my poor room!

[*To Shakespeare, with still more biting irony.*]

A tryst well-chosen—if surprising! But,
You might have barred the door and so averted
My rash and most inopportune intrusion!

SHAKESPEARE

[*Advancing impetuously toward him.*]

This hour's too strangely bright, even in Death's awe,
For blindness. Southampton I hither brought
Lady Elisabeth—untowardly
Belated in the court. Guests came and went
And shelter from their curious eyes was meet.

SOUTHAMPTON

[*His suspicion entirely disarmed.*]

Well done!

SHAKESPEARE

When all below at last have gone
Safely attend her home. For I must go.

SOUTHAMPTON

My life for her protection!

SHAKESPEARE

[*Going to him, takes his hand and speaks with solemnity.*]

Thus with you
I leave the dearest Treasure of my life.
My radiant Pearl of price—long travailed for.
For in this hour it is not given to me
To stay and love my Pearl. Nor beat my breast
And deep bemoan my dead—once close—so close
To mine own life! My part is not to wait—

To love—or to reflect. But to watch life
As it flies past—wrest from its changing mask
Its secrets dark or ravishingly bright,
And then turn all to Beauty where—look well!
You'll find the mirror of your own life's Pageantry.
Why do I thus? (With a half smiling, almost apologetic manner)
I can do nothing else!
I'm not a peasant—nor a courtier—
In the Exchange how weary I should grow!
And then—all turns to gold for those I love
Who wait at home. I can do nothing else!
[*With awe and solemnity.*]
They say my wife is gone! I cannot stop
Th' immutable stern steps of destiny.
I know my children safe—Now I must go
Fulfil the Queen's command—for that is in
The path that I can tread and stumble not.
And then to Stratford. But—(he takes Elisabeth's hand)

Here is my Love.
My love incarnated—whom I must leave—
To whom I must return—or else—I die!
For to reach Stratford from the Earl's,
Where I must play next week before the Queen,
I must pass Titchfield. There to taste again
As I do now—a life transcending Life,
Transcending even Death.

[*To Southampton.*]

So guard my Love—
My heart's own friend—whose loyalty I trust
More than I trust my own.

[*Elisabeth and Southampton have listened and watched Shakespeare with silent wonder. A noise of men's voices, speaking loudly, is heard in the passage outside the door. Southampton springs to bolt it, but it is flung open and Herbert and Essex enter, Herbert laughing loudly. As they enter, Shakespeare tears the short black*

velvet coat from his shoulders, and gives it to Elisabeth.]

Quick—veil yourself!

[*Elisabeth wraps the cloak around her head like a hood and veils her face with it, withdrawing against the wall.*]

ESSEX

[*Angrily.*]

Southampton! Wanton as ever!

HERBERT

[*Laughing loudly and recklessly.*]

Ah! ha! Southampton! We wait in the court for your conference on State matters—while you and Will Shakespeare are revelling here! [*Going to the table.*] By Phoebus! Wine—a banquet—and a Lady! You might have bidden us. [*He pours out two glasses of wine and taking one goes toward Elisabeth, staggering slightly.*] Your good health, Fair One!

[*Elisabeth shrinks back against the wall.*]

At least I assume you to be fair!

ESSEX

[*With grim humor.*]

A rash assumption. Else, why the hood?

HERBERT

Unveil, sweetest, and give his doubt the lie.

ESSEX

Since ladies of the court, or shy maidens, do not frequent Southampton's room at night, why this reserve?

HERBERT

[*Drawing close to Elisabeth attempts, with drunken assurance, to snatch the cloak from her head.*]

Tantalize me no longer—mysterious Beauty!

[*During this scene, Southampton has betrayed great uneasiness. Shakespeare has remained motionless near Elisabeth, intently listening to and watching Herbert and Essex. As*

Herbert touches the cloak wrapped about Elisabeth's head, he strikes his hand up and stands between Herbert and Elisabeth, at the same time bursting into a peal of laughter.]

SHAKESPEARE

Your pardon Herbert, but the situation is laughable as you will confess!

[*The great sweetness of his manner, and his laughter disarms Herbert's anger and he listens as Shakespeare continues.*]

As Essex truly says, ladies of the court, or young girls are not found in Southampton's room at night!

HERBERT

[*Loudly echoing his laugh.*] Well said! [*To Southampton angrily.*] Then again, why the veil? Speak to your Incognita, Southampton, and bid her not spoil sport with such mock mystery. Do your part! Come Laggard!

[*He advances toward Southampton with an air of tipsy violence.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Gently resisting his advance.*] But listen! It is amusing. A novel predicament! Some say Southampton's fault is youth and wantonness! Sure he has grace and gentle sport, as becomes the young! Were he a wolf he might betray a lamb! But even when faults resort to him they become graces! As now—! This—(He indicates Elisabeth) may be some imprudent Lady of another world than the court—possibly, alas! of my world—the theatre! For through an unguarded life their manners perforce grow careless. What think you Herbert?

HERBERT

[*With an air of wisdom.*]
I think it likely.

SHAKESPEARE

And Southampton—being no wolf—would

spare the crimsoning of this lamb's white wool.

HERBERT

[*With irritation.*]

Why seek to shelter Southampton, who blushes not at all!

SHAKESPEARE

Faith! I love him in such sort that his good report is mine also!

HERBERT

[*Again turning toward Elisabeth.*] Why not speak for yourself, Sweet Silence? Are you to be kept hidden even against your own will? I'll soon end that! [*He again tries to pass Shakespeare, staggering and almost falling.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Interposing again between them.*] Would you not feel pity if I were to let you hear a tale of this encounter? It is a Romance in one sweet-scented page. [*Herbert stops and listens.*] What if Southampton and this lady

have but looked! But her eyes have magic and they draw him as by a spell. What if they had but spoken—but with tenderness rising in their hearts, drawn upward by *his* eyes that have the sun's fire in them. What if they but talked in the court when steps came near. Ever-and-ever-more-near. [*He advances slowly and mysteriously toward Herbert.*] A man's heavy step! He approaches them—nearer—they see him—dark, menacing, and in his hand the glint of steel! [*With growing power.*] Is it her husband? She must be saved—saved at any hazard! Southampton springs forward—catches him by the throat! [*With a tremendous outburst.*] *Thus!*

[*Shakespeare makes a swift dart at Herbert and catches him by the throat. Elisabeth shrieks. Herbert struggles and curses.*]

HERBERT

Ruffian! Dastard! Unloose me!

SHAKESPEARE

[*Releasing him, bursts into gay laughter.*] Forgive me, Herbert! I am a player and must ever play at life! And when the mood is on—my word, I know not what madness I do! Your pardon!

HERBERT

[*Bewildered and credulous.*] Yes—Yes! My pardon willingly and here's my hand.

ESSEX

[*Applauding.*] By Heaven! Quite a comedy, and well-played!

HERBERT

[*With sudden irritation.*]

S'death! But your hands clutched me! [*With sudden anger.*] You hound, by what right do you thwart the pleasure of gentlemen? Go back to your Bear Garden! [*To Elisabeth.*] And you! So—So—Thus do our eyes drink your beauty.

[*He eludes Shakespeare by a swift move-*

ment and snatches the cloak from Elisabeth's head. At the same instant Shakespeare overturns the lamp which falls to the ground with a crash and is extinguished. The stage is dark. As the lamp crashes, Elisabeth screams again. Then all stand silent.]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Standing before Elisabeth in the darkness.*] Truth, Gentlemen, it is I, not this lady or Southampton whose blushes need shelter, and see how kindly has the darkness done it for me! For—the truth must out—I have a fancy for her myself! 'Tis folly sure with Southampton in the lists! What fortune can my passion have against him *whose bosom is endeared with all hearts! I—who am in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes. I—who to behold desert am but a beggar born, forced to make myself a motley to the view.* He has but to cast his eyes earthward and there's a woman at his feet! [*With increasing pas-*

sion.] While I am alone—and *she is to my thoughts as food to life.* Gentlemen, at birth the world was given to you, but *her love is better than high birth to me. I call for nothing in the Universe save her, my Rose.* And so—your indulgence. Be she of the Theatre, of the Markets, or even some Night Wanderer of the streets, 'tis she I love—and by your own sacred loves, hidden in your hearts, I conjure you, spare mine!

[*All have listened silently as Shakespeare speaks. As he ceases, Herbert sets on the table the still filled wine glass he has held. He lays his hand on Essex's arm and together they silently go out of the room and down the stair. The setting moon now shines directly into the room, so that Shakespeare, Elisabeth and Southampton and the whole room are clearly seen. Shakespeare continues to speak, but this time much more quietly and directly to Southampton and Elisabeth.*]

Thus do we Mummers rend the veil from our own hearts, that the sleeping nobleness in others may be wakened. And, so that end is served, it is well done. Now may Dew from Heaven descend upon you both and keep you stainless and refreshed. [*He takes their hands in his.*] Be true. Be true. Not with the truth that says "I'm true" but winks, half-looks, and with an eyelid's lift betrays a soul and splits a mighty heart; but with the truth that says—"Thou shalt be safe and thy love honored, though my name be stained and blotted from men's minds;"—and lives it out until the death of Time. Farewell! Farewell! At Titchfield on the 6th of June I shall be with you. Spurred by such Friendship and such Love, to reach a height, as man among my fellow-men that this our world has never known before. And—who can gainsay my word?—may never know again. [*To Southampton.*] When all your guests are gone, safely attend her home. Forget not. And now farewell, my dearest Ones.

[*He presses Southampton's hand against his heart with both his and abruptly bending low kisses Elisabeth's hand, and goes toward the door. Exit Shakespeare, closing the door. Southampton replaces the lamp and striking a light relights it. Elisabeth has seated herself by the table. Southampton goes to her and speaks, leaning on the table.*]

SOUTHAMPTON

[*In a hard, half angry tone.*]

Speak truth. Is he mad?

ELISABETH

But partly so.

SOUTHAMPTON

Surely it is madness. How very strange he is to-night!

ELISABETH

[*Striving to speak lightly.*]

So poets should be. Is poetry the daily fruit of most men's lives?

SOUTHAMPTON

This hour's full of torment for me. Will you speak truth if I do question you?

ELISABETH

[*Looking unflinchingly in his eyes.*] I will.

SOUTHAMPTON

Is he—[*he stops abruptly.*] He bade me take you safely home.

ELISABETH

Hark!

[*She goes quickly to the door and opens it. Loud voices and laughter from the Court below and footsteps crossing it are heard. She returns to her seat by the table. She sinks into it and leans back with the same abandonment that she had shown with Shakespeare.*]

We still must wait! There is no haste.

SOUTHAMPTON

Will you speak truth? I should say, can a woman speak truth? All truth, I mean.

ELISABETH

I can—I will—to you.

SOUTHAMPTON

Whether I doubt or believe, I'll question you. Answer you what you will. Is Will Shakespeare mad or do you love him?

ELISABETH

[*She covers her face with her hands in deep agitation.*]

O, I believe I do! I love his greatness which few see as I.

SOUTHAMPTON

Do I not know his greatness? Hell's at work in my life! But we're here in the world. What can come of such love?

ELISABETH

I do not know.

SOUTHAMPTON

Could you give your life to him? Could you wed Will Shakespeare, even had he no wife?

ELISABETH

[*Again with agitation.*]

O—I know not.

SOUTHAMPTON

And if you do not wed—I am a man—what then?

ELISABETH

Shame! Probing to the heart the bud that is not yet a rose!

SOUTHAMPTON

Damnation! Is life to betray me twice in one day? I will not have it. I've thirsted, in the ages since this afternoon, for this hour. It comes quickly—but—it cheats.

Answer again. Are you pledged willingly in any sense that's true, to Will Shakespeare?

ELISABETH

[*With subtle coquetry.*]

O pledged? No—Pledged is a hard word. But were he another than he is it would be true —all true.

SOUTHAMPTON

He has deceived himself?

ELISABETH

Yes.

SOUTHAMPTON

Then if he is self-deceived and you not pledged, I'll speak: There is no treason. I swear that when I met you in the Court this afternoon my heart was empty as a shell that whispers of the distant sea. That sea of Love that often breaks its waves upon a stone.

ELISABETH

A stone?

SOUTHAMPTON

A woman can turn stone as easily as breathe . . . . at least so Bridget Manners can! I've looked upon your beauty all these years. Feasted upon it as I would upon a sun-riped nectarine. My senses would have starved if I'd not seen its richness upon such and such a day. But I was blind. A little vile, yellow, speck of dust between my eyes and sunlight. But when I saw you today I—dried, parched by that same dust—knew you could fill my heart up to the brim with life.

ELISABETH

O too late! Too late!

SOUTHAMPTON

What do you mean?

ELISABETH

[*With reserve.*]

Did I not say to you that maids are wisest when they doubt all words of yours.

SOUTHAMPTON

[*Passionately.*]

O words—what are words? Look at me. I've starved on a dream and now I'm Life itself for you. We're here, alone, and Life, its very self, no cheat or dream, is pressing close. Will you let it slip away? If you so wish—I'll go.

ELISABETH

No, No!

SOUTHAMPTON

[*He kneels on one knee close to her knees and takes her hands.*]

May I kneel here and worship?

[*Elisabeth does not answer.*]

How still! Do I displease you so? Do you wish me to leave you?

ELISABETH

[*Closing her eyes and speaking as if drugged.*]

No! No!

SOUTHAMPTON

What am I to you?

ELISABETH

[*Slowly opening her eyes and meeting his.*] The Kingdoms of the World and the Glory of them.

SOUTHAMPTON

Caught!

[*He snatches her in his arms and kisses her violently. She does not rebuke him but reaches out her arms and strains him to her, returning his embrace and kiss with twofold passion. They release each other and Southampton stands, looking down upon her upturned face. The door is suddenly opened and Shakespeare enters. He goes toward them.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*With deep, restrained emotion.*] Forth from this great Enchantment I could

not go to meet the world without one last, dear look. You need not speak. Let but my eyes, my heart embrace you both. [*To Southampton.*] My Friend! [*To Elisabeth.*] My Happiness!

[*As they stand with slightly bowed heads, guilty and silent, he goes toward the door and there stops, hat in hand, looking at them. He calls in a clear voice.*]

There are my two Angels!

CURTAIN

END OF ACT III

ACT IV

THE PYRE—THE NEW PHOENIX RISES FROM THE ASHES JUNE 1598

ACT IV

THE PYRE—THE NEW PHOENIX RISES FROM THE ASHES JUNE 1598

SCENE: [*Bacchanal music.*] *The Garden and Terrace of Titchfield, the country seat of the Earl of Southampton. A background of trees and sky. Across the back of stage is a stone ivy-grown terrace with a balustrade. A stone stair leads down on either side from the terrace to the foreground of the stage. Trees, flowering shrubs and flowers flank either side. There is a stone seat at the right. In the centre at back, built against the stone terrace, is a fountain with a semi-circular stone basin with a broad rim. The whole scene has a picturesque and romantic beauty. At the left above, opening on the Terrace, is seen the corner of a vine-covered, stone*

manor-house. The windows of the house are lighted. The moonlight is clear and brilliant. Lighted lanterns of soft light colours hang in the trees. When the curtain rises, nymphs, in filmy draperies with cymbals and wreaths of flowers, and satyrs and fauns dressed in skins and crowned with green leaves, are moving across terrace and steps and among the shrubs and trees. As the curtain rises they sing to the accompaniment of the orchestra; as they sing they rush wildly down the steps, the satyrs and fauns striving to catch the nymphs, who elude them, laughing and dancing.]

SONG

ALL

For this night we are not men
Nymphs and Fauns and Satyrs we!

SATYRS AND FAUNS

Peep at head and feet and then
Furry ears and hoofs you'll see!

ALL

If a stranger cross our path
Dare our covert to intrude,
Straight we crush him with our wrath
Drive him from our sacred wood.

FAUNS

If a maiden this way come
Rightful prey is she of ours;
Swiftly do we bear her home
To our couch of moss and flowers.

ALL

For this night we are not men
Nymphs and Fauns and Satyrs we!

SATYRS AND FAUNS

Peep at head and feet and then
Furry ears and hoofs you'll see!
[*Stage Direction—The music for this song is abrupt and rough, and at the end of each verse the cymbals clash wildly.*]

[*At the end of this song the Satyrs and Nymphs and Fauns creep back behind the shrubs and trees and hide.*]

[*Enter Shakespeare dressed in a black costume like the one Southampton has prepared for the Masque. He wears the blue ribbon and star of the order of the Garter. He is unmasked but carries a mask in his hand. He wears also a large black hat and cloak.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Removing his hat as if for more freedom.*]

How clear this air! How magical these flowers!
There is some rare enchantment in this place,
Some spirit breathing balms of Joy and Youth.
I know not what awaits me here to-night,
From Stratford, whence my messenger should come—

From Stratford, where I go upon the morrow;
What word of Death—or Life renewed for Anne.
I know not whether I am bound or free—
What comes is veiled—but this one thing is sure—
This hour is deadly sweet, and brings to me
The life of mine own life, Elisabeth!
Through all these wasteful, fruitless days and weeks,
Love-haunted, love-tormented, I have dragged
Body and will to meet each hour's behest.
While far across the miles that stretched between
My spirit free and swift and strong as fire
Has flown and dwelt with her, so leaving me
A ravished altar, bankrupt of its flame—
A dead man, living still, whose soul survives
But in the pleasure of his Mistress' will.
Yet now all life sweeps back to fill my life
And every step that brings me closer her

Makes me tenfold a man—Nearer a god!

[*He touches the star and ribbon of the Garter.*]

For once a Prince! Though but for one short night,

Sweet Heaven, send some princely destiny!

[*Bacchanal music. The Satyrs and Fauns creep from the bushes and spring upon Shakespeare singing roughly.*]

SATYRS

If a stranger cross our path,
Dare our covert to intrude,
Straight we crush him with our wrath,
Drive him from our sacred wood.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Joyously.*]

My old-time Forest-Friends at last! Come on!

I've waited for you long!

FIRST SATYR

Now throw him down!

SECOND SATYR

I'll trip his heels!

THIRD SATYR

I'll twist and break his bones!

SHAKESPEARE

Come rough or smooth, all's well for me to-night!

[*He fights with the satyrs, overpowers them and drives them back to the covert of the bushes.*]

SATYRS AND FAUNS

[*Singing mournfully behind the bushes and groaning at the end of each line.*]

For to-night we are not men—

O! O! O!

Fauns and hairy Satyrs we—

O! O! O!

SHAKESPEARE

[*He advances a few steps.*]

A mystic night borne from a land of dreams!
Are all my visions closing round my path,
No dreams but substance of my life at last?

[*Soft music is heard. A water Nymph rises slowly from the fountain.*]

WATER NYMPH

[*Holding out her arms to Shakespeare.*]

Beloved, I've risen from such far, green depths,
Dashing the salt spray from my seeking eyes.
Long, long ago—you called me from the sea—
I heard and I am come to answer you.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Going nearer to the fountain. He speaks with humour, shuddering.*]

The women of the sea must be so cold!

WATER NYMPH

The women of the earth are ever false!

SHAKESPEARE

This even from a Water-Fay!

WATER NYMPH

Trust None!

SHAKESPEARE

Not even you?

WATER NYMPH

Trust no one on the earth.
Trust me. Deep as the sea my love. Come!
Come!

[*She holds out her arms, beckoning.*]

SHAKESPEARE

No love of yours for me, nor mine for you!
But I can dream a thousand lives in one.
Earth, sea, and sky are mine, if so I choose!

[*He goes quickly to the edge of the fountain. The Water Nymph splashes the water over him and suddenly sinks down in the water and vanishes laughing, mockingly.*]

WATER NYMPH

[*As she sinks.*]

Deep as the sea my love. Follow me there!

[*The Satyrs and Fauns echo her laughter softly from the bushes.*]

SHAKESPEARE

Each briny drop a sea-kiss, fresh and strange.

Through Dreams and Follies to my Star of Love!

[*He passes across the stage and goes out through the shrubs and flowers at right. Enter from terrace above, Elisabeth Vernon and her waiting-woman, Phillida, unmasked, but carrying masks.*]

ELISABETH

How long has Florian paid court to you?

PHILLIDA

A year.

ELISABETH

And how do you regard this youth?

PHILLIDA

I trifle with him when that he is near,
But when he goes I would that he were back.

ELISABETH

In your small way you love! You'll play
your part.
Heed me—Lord Southampton has hidden
from me
Two days. Love-tokens he has sent to me
And written words. But while he's planned
this masque,
Filling these shaded nooks with Nymphs and
Fauns,
Making sweet music sound from every bush,
He has not let me see his face, nor learn
What his disguise to-night. This is a jest
To him, to whet this evening's mystery—
But 'tis to me sheer torment. When he's
gone,
I know not where he goes, nor what he does.
O Phillida, if you should love a man,

Love him, I mean, so you are lost in him,
Passed quite from out yourself, your soul and life
All at the mercy of his veering will,
Then never, never let him from your sight—
For if you do, some mischief's sure to come.

PHILLIDA

I wish that you had never seen his face!
Are men so false?

ELISABETH

Some do not mean to be,
And yet are so! Florian will surely know
What dress his master wears. Watch here for him,
Until he comes—and he is sure to come,
For from the casement in the hall above
Where we were dallying with the other guests,
I spied him speeding toward this very spot
Down the Yew path. Garbed like a Faun in Skins,

Bearing a silver casket in his arms—
Learn all from him.

[*She points down the alley at left.*]

He comes! Dear Phillida,
Now fail me not. I must have sight and speech
Of Southampton to-night. If you should see
My Lord, give this into his hands. Fail not!

[*She gives Phillida a note.*]

[*Exit Elisabeth to house. Phillida goes with her to the top of the terrace. Enter Florian dressed like a Faun, carrying the silver casket.*]

FLORIAN

[*Singing.*]

Mighty Venus, mightier Love
Help who weareth this disguise
Help him Heavenly Powers above
Guard him from her dangerous eyes!

PHILLIDA

[*She plucks a rose from roses that grow*

on the Terrace and throws it, striking Florian who stops and looks up.]

FLORIAN

My Phillida!

PHILLIDA

What have you in that box?

FLORIAN

You shall not know.

PHILLIDA

You swore last week you would do aught I wished.
And the first thing I ask you, you deny!

FLORIAN

Again I swear you—anything—but this!

PHILLIDA

Good even!

[*She goes toward the house.*]

FLORIAN

Phillida!

[*He climbs to the top of the Terrace by means of the stone-work of the Fountain. Phillida returns. Florian lays the silver casket on the top of the balustrade and sits beside it.*]

PHILLIDA

[*Drawing close to him.*]

How beautiful
You are in your Faun's dress!

FLORIAN

I ever said
You'd a rare eye for my fine points!

[*As he speaks, smiling conceitedly, Phillida swiftly opens the casket and snatches the costume from it, examining it before Florian has time to take it from her. Enter Essex in the costume of a Roman warrior. He hides and watches.*]

FLORIAN

You wretch!
But sure 'twas not my fault! For man is strong,
God stronger, woman strongest!

PHILLIDA

[*Eluding Florian, holds up the costume and ornaments laughing.*]

Well I know
This is my Lord Southampton's dress to-night
[*Still eluding Florian who tries to catch her.*]
Black mask and hose and doublet—and the star
And chain and azure ribbon of a knight
Of noble orders most august—the Garter!

FLORIAN

[*Snatching the costume and putting it in the box.*]

I deny your guess!

PHILLIDA

Your eyes affirm its truth.

FLORIAN

Now keep the secret you have stolen from me
Or I am lost! My Lord awaits. A kiss?

PHILLIDA

Not one.

FLORIAN

[*With mock tragedy. Kneeling beseechingly.*]

I prithee, maiden, for the good
Of my poor soul.

[*Phillida eludes him and runs to house laughing.*]

FLORIAN

My time's not yet but comes—
For that lost kiss I'll twenty steal to-night!

[*Exit Florian with casket.*]

ESSEX

The waiting woman of Elisabeth, peeping at Southampton's disguise. Great God! No woman's safe from him, nor he from them! He would wed Bridget Manners, eyes Elisabeth, and lures her maid. Some men should be labelled "Poison" and imprisoned. He even magnetizes me when I am in his presence. Praise Heaven, he goes soon to Paris!

[*Enter Herbert by the same entrance by which Essex entered.*]

ESSEX

Well met, Herbert!

[*Enter the two pages who appeared in Act III, one playing with a cup and ball. They sit on the edge of the fountain, not seeing Essex and Herbert behind the shrubs at right.*]

FIRST PAGE

[*Tossing the ball and trying to catch it in the cup and missing it.*]

I have it from the steward's wife that Lord Southampton is not to marry Lady Bridget Manners—and more than that!

[*Herbert steps forward as if to silence the pages, but Essex restrains him.*]

SECOND PAGE

You've missed the ball three times. It's my turn. [*He takes the cup and ball.*] What more of my Lord Southampton.

FIRST PAGE

You'll never guess!

SECOND PAGE

[*Tossing the ball.*] I know more than I tell. Go on.

FIRST PAGE

'Tis said Lord Southampton has courted Mistress Elisabeth Vernon with too much familiarity. The steward's wife had it from Lady Bridget's maid. The maids know it—the court knows it—the Town will know soon

—everyone but the Queen—and when she knows there'll be a reckoning!

[*Essex starts and unsheathes his sword. Herbert again makes as if to stop the talk of the pages but Essex again restrains him and they listen.*]

SECOND PAGE

No news to me!

FIRST PAGE

The pride of him! You fool not me with your mock knowledge.

SECOND PAGE

Do you remember the night of the game of swords a month since in my Lord's house in Holborn.

FIRST PAGE

Well.

SECOND PAGE

At ten o'clock, I fell asleep hidden in the alcove of the little stair by the door that leads

to my lord's cabinet. At two in the morning [I know, for I heard the bells strike] voices wakened me. Lord Southampton and Mistress Elisabeth came down the stair. At the door to the court she veiled herself and they passed out to the outer court and so to the streets. But I'll warrant you there were soft words and clingings before they left the stair. I saw her face plain. She's a rare Beauty!

FIRST PAGE

Why told you not me before?

SECOND PAGE

I saw Florian beat Peter Dumpser for angering my Lord Southampton that same day. I held my peace because I value my skin and my place. But if others know, I'm safe! [*A whistle is heard from the house.*] The Steward's whistle! Come quick!

[*Exeunt Pages running. Essex stands motionless with bent head. Then speaks with restrained rage and pain.*]

ESSEX

Herbert is this true? No lies.

HERBERT

I would have spared you!

ESSEX

O fooled and gulled! Under my very eyes! Elisabeth! My Pride! The Flower of all our race! Dragged down amid the very ruck of women who fall in the slime of men's lust. Elisabeth in Southampton's room that night! O blind fool! Under my very eyes! [*He pauses as if searching his memory.*] What meant Will Shakespeare by his fond confession that so moved us?

HERBERT

The merest mummery, to shelter his idol, Southampton.

ESSEX

He forewarned me that afternoon that were we matched against each other, he would

triumph. [*Bitterly.*] But I was an easy dupe. How long have you known?

HERBERT

I heard it whispered more than a fortnight since.

[*Two ladies cross the terrace above, talking and laughing and go out at left.*]

ESSEX

I see blood on everything.

PEMBROKE

Have care! Come aside where we may speak unnoticed.

[*Exit Essex and Herbert.*]

[*Enter Shakespeare. He puts on his mask, draws his hat over his eyes and steps aside as the two ladies re-enter from left.*]

FIRST LADY

How are the mighty fallen!

SECOND LADY

She was ever too proud to please me.

FIRST LADY

[*Removing her mask and fanning herself.*] I'm warm with dancing! I pity her the more because of her pride. Will Southampton wed her, think you?

SECOND LADY

If his wooing of her has been so free, why should he?

[*Exit Ladies.*]

SHAKESPEARE

There's some malicious spite at work! They speak of Bridget Manners and Southampton. Who would have thought that scandal would stain that snow image! But none escape!

[*Enter from terrace Phillida. She goes to Shakespeare with a letter in her hand.*]

PHILLIDA

[*Giving him the letter.*]

My mistress bade me place this in your hands.

[*She courtesies and goes out at same entrance.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*With agitation, opens the letter without looking at the address. He looks at the signature.*]

Elisabeth!

[*He reads.*]

"Cruel Beloved—Your absence from me has been winter, though summer is at our doors."

[*He passes his hand across his eyes as if to clear them.*]

O Love, what dost thou to mine eyes that they behold and see not what they see? Do I read right? The words all run together like rose-colored flames. [*He reads again.*] "These June days without you have been but a December night. See how I lay bare my heart, but mighty Love and this dark solitude

have mastered its reserves. Seek me without delay this evening, for I can wait alone no more. Elisabeth."

ELISABETH

[*Shakespeare pauses and then kisses the open letter and hides it in his doublet.*]

O Heaven! Have you in all your divine store a gift more princely than this?

[*He hastily masks himself and draws his hat partly over his eyes as Essex enters at right, unmasked. Enter at left Peter Dumpser in traveling costume.*]

PETER

[*At left.*]

Here comes a man with a sword unsheathed. No more fighting for me!

[*He climbs the nearest tree and watches Essex and Shakespeare.*]

ESSEX

[*Advancing to Shakespeare with blind frenzy.*]

Southampton, Foul Libertine and Coward! Since your crime cries from the housetops, here on your own land, take its just requital.

[*He tries to stab Shakespeare with his short Roman sword. Shakespeare parries the blow, but does not return it. Essex continues more wildly.*]

Think you to hide from me? The very air whispered me your disguise. Will you let me kill you like the dog you are? So be it then.

[*He strikes again. Shakespeare defends himself. Essex's sword pierces his shoulder and in defending another blow, Shakespeare wounds Essex in the right side. Voices and laughter of guests is heard approaching. Essex staggers and falls. Shakespeare attempts to help him to rise, but Essex repels him and struggles to his feet. The guests draw nearer.*]

Curses! I'm helpless. But the end's not now!

[*Guests are seen at entrance to Terrace, at right. Essex goes toward left with difficulty, staggering and swaying. Exit Essex. Guests go out again.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*He staunches the blood from his wound, laughing.*]

Ah Southampton! This dress has stood you in good stead to-night. Better my sturdy blood than the fine wine of yours! But who would have thought Essex would have taken scandal about Bridget Manners so to heart? There's madness spreading in his blood and brain. What more dangerous than the wounded Lion? Where hides Southampton? Some warning's urgent for him. Somewhere in garden or in house he's to be found—and then—my Joy!

[*Exit Shakespeare at right.*]

PETER

[*Descending from the tree.*]

I would I were safe in Stratford!

[*Exit Peter at left. Enter Elisabeth and Phillida.*]

ELISABETH

My lord gave you no answer for me?

PHILLIDA

People were coming and I feared to be seen of them. I gave the letter into his hands and ran away before anyone spied me.

ELISABETH

It was wisest so. But there's no peace. Go seek him Phillida through all the Park, and when you find him tell him I wait him in the vine-covered summer-house by the Old Fish Pool.

PHILLIDA

I'll find him easily. I saw his black dress and blue ribbon but now amid the Masquers in the Pleasance near the house.

ELISABETH

I breathe with more ease. The darkness that has been around me clears. 'Tis a most fair night! I go to the summer-house, Phillida. Send my lord soon.

[*Exit Elisabeth at left. Bacchanal music sounds. Enter Fauns from right, skipping, dancing and singing. They surround Phillida and dance around her.*]

FAUNS

[*Singing.*]

If a maiden cross our path,
Rightful prey is she of ours,
Straightway do we bear her home,
To our couch of moss and flowers.

[*Phillida struggles to escape with genuine alarm, but each time she tries to break the ring the Fauns prevent her.*]

PHILLIDA

Let me go! Let me go! Fiends! Devils!

FAUNS

You're ours! You're ours!

PHILLIDA

[*Struggling wildly with the Fauns.*]

Fools—quit your masquerading! I'm on my Lord's business. Let me go!

FAUNS

She's ours!

[*Enter Florian, dressed as a Faun. He breaks the ring, lifts Phillida in his arms and carries her off.*]

FLORIAN

She's mine!

PHILLIDA

[*Struggling with Florian.*]

Ah! You shall rue this Florian.

[*Exit Florian carrying Phillida at left. Fauns rush off at right, laughing and singing.*]

[*Enter Elisabeth from left back, not the same entrance by which Florian and Phillida have gone out. She calls.*]

Phillida! Phillida! Where are you? I would speak with you!

[*Enter Shakespeare from left still masked and with his hat brim pulled over his eyes. His cloak is thrown back. The Star and chain and ribbon of the Garter show plainly. Elisabeth goes toward him swiftly.*]

O my Love, why have you remained away from me so long? But no masquerading can hide you from my eyes!

[*Bacchanal music. A nymph chased by a Faun runs from left across the stage. Shakespeare has remained silent, only showing by a gesture, his emotion.*]

Did Phillida tell you that I should wait you in the Summer-house by the pool?

[*The Nymph and Faun re-enter together, laughing and talking. They pause near Elisabeth and Shakespeare.*]

ELISABETH

[*Speaking softly.*]

Yes—You are wise to remain masked and silent—so guarding me—for at sight of you I forget all but you. Follow me to the Summer-house. I will go first that there may be no evil eyes to spy, or cruel tongues to slander.

[*Exit Elisabeth at right, followed by the Nymph and Faun.*]

SHAKESPEARE

God! Can such joy be mine! This ecstasy
Is keen and sharp and held me dumb and still
Before the splendour of her wondrous self.
She bade me follow to the Summer-house
Beside the pool. Which house, what pool? O Love,
Guide thou my steps to her. Come glorious Hour!
And let me live at last!

[*Exit Shakespeare at right. Florian's voice is heard shouting from Terrace.*]

Help! Help! Murder has been done!

[*Enter Florian on Terrace, followed by Phillida. He rushes to centre of top of Terrace shouting and calling, in intense excitement.*]

Help! Help!

[*Herbert and guests rush from house at right and from left to the Terrace. many bearing torches, and stand on either side of Florian. Others enter with torches from right and left below. Florian continues to speak loudly with the same excitement.*]

Some one has tried to kill my Lord Essex! 'A dastardly murder be sure. I found him lying in the shrubbery behind the house, bleeding and still. So still I think him dead!

[*Excitement among guests.*]

HERBERT

I'll seek and bear him here.

TWO GENTLEMEN

We'll go with you.

[*Exit Herbert and gentlemen. The guests crowd around Florian, questioning him. Enter Herbert and gentlemen from below at right carrying Essex. They lay him on the grass in centre, in front. The guests crowd the stairs from the terrace on either side, with torches. Others with torches are grouped about Essex, Herbert and Florian in centre.*]

HERBERT

Who has done this?

[*Enter a guest, dragging with him Peter Dumpser.*]

GUEST

Here is a boy who knows more than he will tell.

FLORIAN

That Rat, Pierre!

HERBERT

[*Who has been trying to revive Essex, to Peter.*]

Do you know aught of this?

[*Peter is silent.*]

HERBERT

Come. Speak, Lout.

PETER

I have had trouble in my Lord Southampton's house before now. I would liefer be silent, if it please you, my Lord.

FLORIAN

[*With an air of stern virtue.*]

Speak the truth, Pierre. The whole truth—naught but truth!

PETER

If Florian bids me tell the truth, I know I may! I have been in Stratford with my mother a month and reached Titchfield this

evening. As I came here to the garden seeking my Lord Southampton, and Master Will Shakespeare, I saw two men quarrelling and I climbed a tree, thinking that as the quarrel was none of mine, 'twas best I should take no part in it.

HERBERT

Did you see who fought?

PETER

I saw my Lord Essex, but the other one wore a black mask.

HERBERT

What garments did he wear? What was his height? Tell all.

PETER

He was all in black, but a blue ribbon was drawn across his breast and a great star of diamonds shone upon it. A chain of gold was about his neck, he was of a noble port, and his head was as high as was my Lord Essex's head.

[*Florian shows dismay at Peter's words.*]

HERBERT

[*To guests.*]

Disperse—search the grounds! Find this masked cut-throat.

[*Some of the guests go out hastily. Herbert bends over Essex.*]

FLORIAN

[*Aside to Peter.*]

O Pierre, you witless worm! The black masquer with the ribbon of the garter was my Lord Southampton. You have undone us all!

[*He takes Peter aside and scolds him, while Peter expostulates. Herbert and guests re-enter, bringing with them Southampton masked and dressed in costume like Shakespeare's.*]

HERBERT

Unmask, you scoundrel!

SOUTHAMPTON

What folly is this? By whose insolent in-

terference am I dragged here? [*He sees Essex.*] What's here?

HERBERT

Your mock ignorance avails not. You were seen by this lad. [*He indicates Peter.*]

SOUTHAMPTON

You are all mad. Who has wounded the Earl?

HERBERT

[*To Peter.*]

Was this he whom you saw? Answer.

PETER

[*Whimpering.*]

Indeed he wears the same dress and hat and has the same port and build.

HERBERT

[*To Southampton.*]

Seek not to escape.

[*Enter Elisabeth at right. She waits at entrance listening.*]

SOUTHAMPTON

[*To Herbert.*]

Are you mad too?

[*Enter Shakespeare from left, masked. Herbert and the guests show their surprise at seeing two black masks dressed exactly alike.*]

HERBERT

An end to this folly—unmask both—or by Heaven there now will be force for force—blood for this blood. [*He indicates Essex.*]

[*Shakespeare unmasks and Southampton follows his example. Elisabeth draws near Southampton. Shakespeare kneels beside Essex and puts his hand to his heart.*]

SHAKESPEARE

His heart beats well. He but swoons. [*Imperiously, to the guests.*] You crowd too closely. Back that he may have more air.

[*All fall back but Elisabeth, Southampton, Herbert and Florian.*] A cordial, Florian.

[*Exit Florian to house.*]

ELISABETH

[*Aside to Southampton.*]

O Love, was this wisely done? Had you not kept apart from me these last days, this might have been averted. Why came you not to me earlier? Did not Phillida give my letter into your hands but now?

[*Shakespeare hears her words. He listens dazed. Enter Florian with a cordial. Herbert takes it from him and stooping forces it between Essex's lips. Shakespeare rises and going a few steps aside, takes out the letter and reads the address, while all watch Essex.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Reading the address.*]

To my Lord Southampton.

[*He stands as if stupefied, his face contracted with intense grief. Essex raises himself on his elbow. Southampton goes to him and Shakespeare crosses to Elisabeth at left front.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Showing her the letter.*]

O Siren, false as hell within! What glory dies through you!

[*Elisabeth looks in amaze at him and at his dress. Then she cowers, covering her face with her hands.*]

ESSEX

[*Pushing aside the cordial.*]

Let be. You shall not make a babe of me.

[*He struggles to his feet.*]

Call my servants. I would be away from this curséd place. [*To Southampton.*] Southampton you've hampered me to-night, but our reckoning will come.

SOUTHAMPTON

[*Indignantly.*]

'Fore God, I have not lifted hand against you, nor even seen you this night 'till now.

[*The guests murmur.*]

HERBERT

[*To Southampton.*]

Are you a liar!

[*Shakespeare has stood as if pondering, his head bowed, his face showing profound grief. He moves nearer centre.*]

SHAKESPEARE

[*At front, imperiously, aside to Southampton.*]

Bid your guests go. There is untangling of this snarl, but 'twere better done alone.

SOUTHAMPTON

[*Hesitates—then speaks to guests.*]

Good Friends, this accident has stopped quite our pleasure. That you may be the sooner in-

formed as to its cause and satisfied as to its just repairing, let our Festival end now.

[*He goes toward guests and attends them to the exit at left back. Elisabeth goes to bench at right and sits, her eyes and face partly shaded by her hand.*]

FLORIAN

[*To Phillida as they pass out.*]

Ah! Phillida, if you have it in your heart to be kind, be so now, for Pierre has shamed all my training!

[*Phillida gives him her hand and they pass out at left.*]

ESSEX

[*To Herbert.*]

Your arm.

SHAKESPEARE

[*To Herbert.*]

That this quarrel may be the more quickly mended, I pray you let me speak with Essex.

[*Herbert hesitates, then withdraws a few steps. Southampton is at left back with guests, who go out. Elisabeth seated on the bench at right as before. Shakespeare is in centre at front with Essex.*]

[*To Essex.*]

Essex, for Friendship's sake I fought with you,
To spare Southampton. Wearing his disguise
To add another touch of mystery
To this night's sport—Not knowing what should come!
Your pardon for your wound and mine to you
For this—[*He indicates his wound.*]

ESSEX

[*He turns away impatiently.*]
Enough.

SHAKESPEARE

Ah! Wait. You are too quick.

I claim your patience still. You would destroy
Southampton, thus to clear your cousin's name.
'Tis the world's way! But there's another path
Which taken now may better shelter her.
Whispers are in the air, blown on the wind
Like thistledown. But like the thistledown,
To fall to earth, forgot and trampled on,
If no one fans the air with scandal's breath.
These two, [*indicating Southampton and Elisabeth*] be sure, or soon or late will wed.
For love of her pursue no more revenge.

ESSEX

I cannot speak upon this now—and yet—My thanks.
Herbert, your arm.

[*Herbert rejoins him. Exit Essex and Herbert at left, Essex leaning upon Herbert's arm. The guests have all*

gone. Southampton comes slowly toward centre. He pauses as he draws near Shakespeare and looks at him with anxiety and fear. Elisabeth has risen and stands, her eyes fixed on Shakespeare with a half-terrified expression. Shakespeare is at centre alone, looking toward front with the same expression of profound grief.]

SHAKESPEARE

[*Without turning his head.*]

Southampton.

[*Southampton advances until he stands at Shakespeare's left.*]

You, possessing all that life
Can give to man, *might have forborne* my Love.

SOUTHAMPTON

Her beauty conquered me. She was not pledged
To you, or any other man.

SHAKESPEARE

You plead
As ever plead the darlings of this world—
Falsely—and yet as if of pardon sure.
Yes—beauty tempted—and *your straying youth*
Has led you in its riot even there.
[*Looking toward Elisabeth.*]
Where twofold truth is broken—hers and yours
Both false to me.
[*To Elisabeth.*]
Come. I would speak with you.
[*Elisabeth comes toward him slowly with the same half-terrified expression, until she stands on his right. Shakespeare turns to Southampton.*]
Do you love her? Have care to say what's true,
For there is that in me that in this hour
Would rise with ruin for you, at a lie.
Do you love her?

SOUTHAMPTON

Ah! Better than my life!

SHAKESPEARE

How often have I heard you say those words,
Each separate time about a different woman!
[*Southampton attempts to speak, but Shakespeare silences him by a gesture and turns to Elisabeth.*]
Do you love him?

ELISABETH

[*Her head is bowed as if in deep shame. Then she raises it and speaks, with an effort and yet with daring.*]
I've loved so many—that—
I do not know! I thought that I loved you!

SHAKESPEARE

There speaks the fearless spirit of old blood—
The Truth—ev'n though she shames herself!
[*To Southampton.*]

Again—
Speak Boy—these moments give you time for thought—
What is your love for her?

SOUTHAMPTON

Once I saw fly
A strange, wild bird my falcon could not strike.
I watched it soar and thought if I could lure
Its beauty to my wrist, touch its fair plumes,
And warmly cherish it against my breast,
I'd be content—ev'n though it soared away
And I must ever win it back again.

SHAKESPEARE

She is your mate. Wed her. Keep, if you can.

[*Elisabeth looks startled and makes a motion toward Shakespeare, as if to check him. He turns to her.*]

And you—again—what is this man to you?

ELISABETH

[*Slowly—as if unwilling to speak, yet unable to be silent.*]

He is a Star—the brightest in my sky;
There is a constellation where he shines,
In this my world, the only world I know,
He is a Sun—and where his radiance falls
Life blooms, and every hour glows fair and rich
With promise to my heart's untamed desires.

SHAKESPEARE

No other man or life for you. Wed him.

[*They stand silent as if surprised and shamed. Southampton advances nearer Shakespeare, and then withdraws a few steps and waits, watching Elisabeth. She does not appear to notice him and he goes out at left. Elisabeth draws nearer to Shakespeare, who stands looking forward with deep sad-*

ness, but complete detachment from her. She turns away as if awed. Exit Elisabeth at left, but not by the same exit as Southampton. Shakespeare goes to the stone seat at right and sits. The lights on the Terrace and in the shrubbery flicker and go out. The stage is dark except for a gradual, slow lighting of the dark star-strewn sky, which begins to change to the luminous blue of the early dawn. Petals and flowers of the flowering shrubs fall to the ground. Shakespeare slowly takes off the star and chain and ribbon of the Garter.]

So passes all the Dream and Ecstasy!

[*Enter quietly and timidly from right Peter Dumpser with a letter. He approaches Shakespeare and gives the letter to him.*]

PETER

The answer to your letter, Master Will.

SHAKESPEARE

[*With kindness, but barely noticing Peter.*]

Ah Peter—safely here again—and met
No lions on the way!

[*He gives Peter money. Peter waits a moment and then as Shakespeare does not seem to be conscious of his presence, he goes out as quietly as he entered. Shakespeare opens the letter and reads.*]

"To Will, who is my husband, though so long away: I have been sick of the Fever that has ravaged Stratford, but now, praise God's goodness! I am mending and will soon be again in health. Whiles I was sick, by night and day, I thought upon you. O Will, will you come home to us? Your father and mother wait for you. Our girls are well grown and fairer than pride could desire. Your daughters ask for you. Never will I drive you from us again as I did once. The

gold you send nurtures us richly, but 'tis you we would see. We wait for your coming.

ANNE."

[*He lays the letter beside him on the seat.*]

Does anyone
On earth desire me?

[*Enter from left Elisabeth. She comes toward him hesitatingly and stands at a distance, her hands clasped as if in supplication.*]

ELISABETH

[*With almost childlike timidity.*]

I thought if I
Might come to you in deep humility,
Confess my falseness and forgiveness ask,
This shame and pain that burn my heart would go.

SHAKESPEARE

[*Looking at her as if spellbound.*]

How wondrous are you now as you stand there!

How dark and false! An angel ever dark
And yet to me, loved still—though ever false.

ELISABETH

I meant not to be false!

SHAKESPEARE

I see you now
As souls barred out of Paradise must see
Within its gate, their fair, forbidden Loves.

ELISABETH

[*Goes to him impulsively and kneels by the stone seat. His arm rests on the curved end of it and she bends her head as if to lean it upon his arm. He draws his arm away roughly.*]

SHAKESPEARE

No *potions* shall I drink *of Siren's tears*
Distilled from limbecks foul as hell within!

ELISABETH

[*She weeps, covering her face with her hands.*]

How pitiless you are!

SHAKESPEARE

How pitiless
You are!

ELISABETH

[*She rises and half turns away.*]
Then unforgiven, must I go!

SHAKESPEARE

[*He springs from his seat. She turns toward him.*]
O for forgiveness—why, that has no part
In love! For love is love, and covers all
Both good and ill. No more of that! And now
For you and me.
[*Elizabeth sits on the bench. Shakespeare stands near her.*]
You will go hence from me
To meet another life apart from mine,
Another man's brand on you, blurring mine.
I, to the life my blindness and my fate
Made for me years ago. *So lest the world*
Should task you to recite what merit lived
In me, that you should love, forget me quite,

Lest the wise world should look into your moan
And mock you with me after I am gone!
For I, in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
If thinking on me then should make you woe.

ELISABETH

[*Despairingly.*]

In gaining Southampton I won the world,
In losing you I lost my soul!

SHAKESPEARE

The soul
Is made of stronger stuff! Listen to me.
You cast a lure, a magical rose-film
Around my life. So potent in its spell
I scarcely dared to breathe, lest it should break
And I should die. Pushed on, on every side
Out of its magic I was thrust. It broke—
And in the throes of that dark agony
I knew not Death—but strangely greater Life.

And that this mighty love I bear for you
May bloom for you, I bid you to a tryst
In some bright unseen Star, some unknown Star,
Where all Heaven's debts are paid to thwarted man.

[*He pauses—then looks wonderingly about the garden.*]

That blindness that so cursed my life is gone.
See you how vast this garden has become.
As if an amphitheatre of the world,
All filled with fresh, robust, substantial life—

[*Elisabeth rises startled.*]

Life that outlives our brief, tormented span?

[*He turns toward Elisabeth and lays his hand on her arm and speaks with awe.*]

We are not here alone.

ELISABETH

Alas, he raves!
His o'ercharged heart has turned his noble mind.
What sin to play with such a mighty flame!

SHAKESPEARE

See you who come?

ELISABETH

No, I see none.

SHAKESPEARE

Quite blind!

[*He turns from her. Elisabeth shrinks back in terror; then returns and holds out her arms to Shakespeare. Seeing that he does not seem conscious of her presence, she goes out, her head drooping, at right. Shakespeare looks toward the left at back.*]

They come! How strange—and yet so close my heart,
Its every throb pulses to give them life.

[*In the dim light at the back of the stage at right, a shadowy procession of figures pass. They are seen but dimly. They represent Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Lear and, last, Prospero. As*

they pass each stops, turns and looks at Shakespeare, and then passes on. Shakespeare speaks as if dazed and dreaming.]

What beautiful, majestic forms are these!
That princely youth who pierces to my soul
With sad and supplicating eyes. Those kings,
Unknown and mighty—that most noble Moor
With soul convulsed by an immortal grief.

[*He advances a few steps nearer the procession of figures.*]

Command me, O ye noble ones and great!

[*He covers his eyes with his hand.*]

I am your servant, and would gladlier
Serve you, than any on this earth.

[*Exit figures, all but Prospero.*]

Who comes?
What gravity of life! What wisdom stored!
What passion past! What powers laid aside!
Shall be so one day? You make me fear,
Grave Shape. In thee I seem to see, the man
To come in me.

[*He clasps his hands as if in prayer.*]

". . . My charms are all o'er thrown
And what strength I have's mine own
Which is most faint . . .
. . . Now I want
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;
And my ending is despair,
Unless I be relieved by prayer;
Which pierces so that it assaults
Mercy itself, and frees all faults."

[*Exit Prospero. Shakespeare passes his hand across his eyes as if awakening from a dream.*]

They're gone!
Were they then ever here? I saw them plain.
There's that in this I do not understand!
They live in me, and I must give them Life,
And show their greatness to a listening world.
The gift is mine, and I shall hold it fast.

[*The sky is changing from the clear deep*

blue of early morning to the rose of dawn. He looks about.]

Elisabeth! Gone too! And yet, still mine!

[*He sits on the bench.*]

I know and hold my power in my grasp,
Mightier than my hopes.

[*With a sudden change to keen emotion.*]

But, O my Heart!
When will the life be sweet?

[*In the centre of the rose sky near the horizon, a luminous gold light is seen, as if the sun were about to break forth.*]

I recall once
I wandered in the spring in flower-strewn fields,
And held my little daughters by the hand;
Close, close to me on either side, they walked
With baby steps, breast-deep in daffodils.
The sun poured beams upon their golden heads,

The whole world laughed, and love and joy secure
Stole in my heart and asked that they might stay.

[*He takes the letter in his hand and reads.*]

"Your daughters ask for you." The day I fled
From home, they called—"Sweet Father—let us come
To you." Should I have stayed? Has all this pain,
This empty heart, come from the following
Of what seemed then the only path to tread?
Do they still call for me? Is it too late
To go to them?

[*The round disc of the gold light in the sky has grown more brilliant. It becomes transparent and there is seen within its circle the figures of two young girls of about fifteen and sixteen years. They are standing in a field of tall grass, daffodils and cow-*

slips, in golden sunlight. The blue sky is above and behind them. Their yellow hair falls on their shoulders. They are bending, absorbed in gathering the flowers. Shakespeare rises, turns and sees them. He looks in wondering joy. They raise their heads smiling, as if touched by some loving influence. Shakespeare speaks wtih passionate joy.]

My Children! Darling Ones!
My Own! With you to stay my empty heart,

[*He half turns to front and speaks with triumph.*]

I'll make those Shapes Majestic lately here,
Immortal in this world.

[*He turns and holds out his arms to his daughters.*]

Dear Ones, I come!

[*The vision vanishes. Sunlight floods the scene.*]

CURTAIN

END OF PLAY

Note I.—The play is historically accurate as to dates, principal events, etc. In some instances, actual conversations between some of the characters have been recorded in old private letters written in Latin, of which but two copies of translations are in existence.

Note II.—In the latter part of Act III, and in Act IV, where Shakespeare speaks of his love, he has in several instances been permitted to speak for himself in the words of the sonnets. Where he has done so, the words are in italics.

Note III.—To Mr. Roger Laneham, of the Court of Queen Elisabeth, Florian's grateful thanks are due.

SHAKESPEARE.

An Overture—Fantasia.

FOR THE PLAY

WILL SHAKESPEARE

OF

STRATFORD AND LONDON.

Synopsis of the Overture—Fantasia.

PRELUDE.

Sylvan Music—Then Romantic and Passionate—Then Sylvan again, which continues for a few moments after the curtain rises.

ACT I

I. Song for Shakespeare, without accompaniment.

II. Song, Quartette for male voices, no accompaniment.

INTERLUDE

BETWEEN ACT I AND ACT II

Expressing stormy emotion and anger—which dies away into music expressing night and repose, and then returns to the stormy emotion—

Then melts into a spinning song in which the instruments imitate the whir and thump of a spinning wheel.

ACT II

Scene I

I. March for the Players entering Stratford.

INTERLUDE

Between Scene I of Act II and Scene II, again expressing night and repose which continues after the curtain rises. Love Motif first occurs.

Scene II

Music for a moonlight procession of young people who drift across the stage with soft laughter in the darkness, lighted only by moonlight.

INTERLUDE

Between Act II and Act III, representing Splendor of Life and Love. Love motive.

ACT III

I. Love Song accompanied by orchestra. It is a Quartette for the four parts, Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass.

II. Music for a procession of guests, orchestral.

INTERLUDE

Repeating Love motive, which leads into Revelry music, which continues after the curtain rises.

ACT IV

I. Bacchanal Music.

II. Song for Satyrs and Fauns with orchestral accompaniment.

III. Love motive and Bacchanal music. Love music.

FINALE

Of Elevated, serious music, Emotional, yet almost Religious in character.

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